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Sharon A. Pettie BSc Hons. MSc.

SECRETS ABOUT BIOLOGICAL PARENTAGE:
EXPERIENCES OF CONCEALMENT AND REVELATION.
A QUALITATIVE STUDY.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Open University
for the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology

April 1999

SALOMONS
CANTERBURY CHRIST CHURCH UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

AWARD DATE: 29 JUNE 1999

DECLARATION OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort has been made to preserve the confidentiality of the present study. All names and information which could identify anyone taking part have therefore been changed.

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Finally, on both a personal and professional note I would like recognise and appreciate the contribution of my husband, Clive Britten, who has lived this experience alongside me. I have valued his thoughtful comments and his capacity to offer calm encouragement over the months.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated the experiences of twelve adults who discovered new information about the identity of one or both parents in adolescence or later. Some had grown up in adoptive or stepfamilies; others had been conceived using donated sperm. Participants were interviewed once about their experiences when the information was revealed, and the effect they perceived it had over time. The transcribed interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999).

The findings indicated that for many participants the impact of unplanned revelations was considerable, and the emotional repercussions often persisted for many years. The information affected participant's perceptions of their sense of self, and who they were in relation to others. The effects of this appeared to reverberate through many parts of the family system. It was suggested that concealment may have affected early parent-child relationships and contributed to feelings of difference or not belonging. The secret was perceived to have affected family communication before the revelation, and this was often difficult afterwards.

Findings were considered in relation to identity development, attachment theory and social constructionist perspectives. A tentative model of the processes by which people integrate this information was proposed. Suggestions were made regarding therapeutic work with individuals and families after revelations of this nature, and those considering the opening of such secrets. Further research in this area is indicated and is particularly relevant to families created through gamete donation.

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INTRODUCTION

Brief overview

In the last twenty years the effects of secrets on family functioning have been described, using as examples families who have presented for therapy. Some psychoanalytical writers have drawn on clinical material to discuss the impact on the individual. From a systemic perspective there have been attempts to develop a model for classifying secrets and thinking about the relative positions of individuals in the system. Secrets about biological parentage may have developed in three main circumstances, namely through adoption, in stepfamilies and through the use of reproductive technologies. These areas will each be addressed along with some theoretical ideas that have been useful in considering the impact of secret keeping and revelation.

The systemic view

Karpel (1980) conceptualised the systemic nature of secrets. He emphasised that the differential sharing of information between people was clearly embedded in the relationship context. He discussed the effect secrets have on family structure, particularly alliances and boundaries, and the implications for loyalty and betrayal, abuse of power and the potential for destructive disclosures. The tendency for secrets to be about facts has

been linked with the important 'ethical-existential' dimension of human life in close relationships (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973).

Three classifications of family secrets have been delineated (Karpel, 1980). **Individual secrets** where the information is withheld from all other people in the family; **internal family secrets** where at least two people keep a secret from at least one other and **shared family secrets** where members are pledged to keep information from those outside the family. He elucidated the different positions in the 'awareness context', of secret-holder(s), the unaware and the subject (i.e. the person who the secret is about, who may also be the unaware). Karpel considered the motivations for secret keeping and questioned '*who is really being protected and from what*' (p. 299). He pointed out that although the secret might be framed as protecting the unaware, it was often the earlier actions of secret holders that avoided scrutiny, or a painful issue that was concealed.

Secret keeping in certain contexts can be seen as appropriate and necessary for healthy development, for example, when adolescents' share secrets with peers outside the family as a marker of individuation and maturation (Haley, 1976). Imber-Black (1993) used the term **toxic secrets** to suggest the negative consequences that could develop when important information had been concealed. She and Pittman (1993) postulated that toxic secrets blocked communication and damaged relationships, and affected healthy psychological development. They contributed to the shaping of dyads, triangles, splits and cut-offs in the family, defined who is

'in' and who is 'out' and calibrated closeness and distance. Pittman asserted '*you are separated from those to whom you lie*' (p. 32) and suggested that dealing with facts that have been concealed could be less problematic than efforts to heal the damage done by lying and betraying trust. Papp (1993) gave examples from therapeutic work where the concealment of biological origins had skewed relationships between parents and children. The effects of unexpected revelations presenting in the clinical arena have included emotional distress, cognitive upheaval and issues relating to identity. It has also been argued that secrecy is a socially constructed concept (Roberts, 1993), and that prevailing discourses and the larger context must be considered.

Karpel (1980) raised the significant issue of the '*relevance of the information for the unaware*' (p. 298) in trying to assess whether the withholding of information should be viewed as privacy or secrecy. He suggested a stance of '*accountability with discretion*' (p. 298) in which serious consideration was given to the potential views of the unaware person, and that sensitivity was accorded to the timing and consequences of disclosure for this individual. Imber-Black (1998) advocated developing a plan that considers the network of relationships around the secret, especially those potentially affected by any revelation, so that secrets can be opened with care, and an attempt made to minimise the destructive consequences for individuals and family relationships.

Therapeutic work with secrets: a psychoanalytical perspective

Psychoanalytic observations (Avery, 1982; Jacobs, 1980; Schocket, 1980) have generally focussed on descriptions of the subtle effects of secrets on the individual and note how some of these dynamics may come into the transference. Some of the processes used to explain the effects are taken from object-relations theory, for example, Schocket (1980) described work with a woman who had been told at the age of 20 that she was adopted. Jones (1997) explored adult relationship difficulties experienced by adoptees presenting for counselling and helped them understand the effects and implications of abrupt, premature separation from the mother.

Avery (1982) described the loyalty to a family secret as an inseparable part of belonging and hinted at the complexity of intra-psychic conflicts embedded in the family context. He pointed out that secrets protect both the vulnerabilities of individuals, and spare the family's ego ideal from challenge. He asserted that '*there is no logical termination to the task of carrying a secret unless the mandate to do so is rescinded*' (p. 484), which has the effect of binding secret keepers together and promoting a sense of guilty responsibility. Jacobs particularly emphasised the role of the family in child development. Using clinical examples he illustrated how the effects of secrets closely guarded by parents could be subtly communicated through mixed messages, and may be played out in the relationship with the analyst. He asserted that secretive phenomena may effect ego functioning, learning and the consistency of the superego.

Secrets about biological parentage

Secrets about the identity of one (or both) parent(s) would be seen as internal family secrets in Karpel's classification. Most writers would agree that the information being withheld is of fundamental relevance for the individual, who is both the unaware and the subject within the awareness context. The extent of other people's knowledge about the biological parent is likely to vary in different families, and in how much it is known beyond the family boundary. This may also be a function of the circumstances of the child's conception and/or entry into the family.

Adoption

Prevailing attitudes about adoption have changed dramatically during this century (Hill & Shaw, 1998; Lunnon, 1998). Originally there was a strong emphasis on keeping adoption secret. In past decades the conception and birth of children outside marriage, and the placing of children for adoption were all the subject of stigma (Cole & Donley; 1990, Winkler, Brown, von Keppel & Blanchard; 1988), and the sealing of birth records must be viewed in the context of history and social attitudes. Opinions have changed, and the commitment to sharing origins with adopted children is now considered the norm. More recently, there has been greater consideration of the needs of older children who have existing relationships with their birth parent(s). This has led to a move towards maintaining, rather than severing, these links in 'open' adoption (Adcock, Kaniuk & White 1993).

It is considered essential that adopted children are told their history in a supportive manner and that the willingness of adoptive parents to talk about this openly is an important factor in later adjustment (McWhinnie, 1967, 1969; Tresiliotis, Shireman & Hundlebury, 1997). Such information has been linked to the formation of personal and social identity. Changes in social policy and legislation have supported this, and procedures have been developed which facilitate access to birth records and the finding of biological relatives when the adopted child reaches adulthood. Initially only rudimentary guidelines were provided to adoptive parents about how to tell their children. Research led to a greater understanding of children's conceptual development and how this related to their capacity to differentiate adoption and birth, understand the permanence of an adoptive family, and the legal aspect of the process. Early telling was supported as it provided a '*foundation for an honest and trusting relationship*' and avoided the '*burden of deception*' (Brodzinsky, 1984, p. 115).

The majority of adoptees searching for birth parents interviewed by Triseliotis (1973) reported late or traumatic revelation of their origins. The change in practice was reflected in a later study (Kowal & Schilling, 1985) which surveyed 110 adoptees. The majority (60%) had been told at an early age, and only 11% had learned of their adoption as adolescents or adults, often by accident. In neither study was the experience of revelation explored in detail, and no attempt was made to relate this with other variables.

Studies of adopted children and adults have shown that some experience difficulties in the process of identity formation (Hoopes, 1982, 1990; Humphreys & Humphreys, 1989; Josselson, 1980, 1987; Sants, 1964), and many have a strong desire to know more about their birth parents (Bertocci & Schechter, 1991; Partridge, 1991). Some, particularly when placements have been less secure, have shown a powerful need to search for, and ultimately meet the people who created them. For some people this had a positive effect on their sense of identity and they expressed a greater appreciation of their adoptive parents as their 'real' parents (Depp, 1982).

A number of writers (Schechter & Bertocci, 1990; Verrier, 1997) have outlined challenges regarding loss, control, human connectedness, self worth and feelings of difference that adoptees must resolve. For parents issues have included unresolved feelings about infertility (Blum, 1983), developing attachments (Groze, 1992; Portello, 1993) and the sense of entitlement to parent (Cohen, Coyne & Duvall, 1996). Kramer (1982) suggested that denial of the child's adoption, even when well intentioned, inhibits the joining of the adoptee to the family, as it fails to acknowledge reality and difference.

Stepfamilies

Stepfamilies, as one of the new family forms, have been written about extensively (Gorell Barnes, 1998; Herz Brown, 1989; McGoldrick & Carter, 1989; Peck & Manocherian, 1989; Robinson, 1991) and a greater

understanding of the processes affecting families through divorce and remarriage has been the result. Many writers have mentioned the difficulty of giving up the reality of the 'nuclear family', in the context of stepfamilies having been seen as less than ideal. There has been little mention of the potential for secrets to develop about parentage in these situations.

In re-formed extended families where there is a cut-off from one biological parent (usually the father), the stepparent may become the psychological parent, particularly when the child is very young. Robinson (1991) used the term '*legitimizing*' (p.122) to describe stepfamilies that included children who had been conceived while their mother and previous partner were not married. She wrote that children may want to know about, and make contact with the absent parent, and "*may well feel betrayed by their parents if they are not told the truth about what is after all their family history*" (p. 254). Although two of the sixteen case studies featured a secret about paternity, this was not focussed on in any detail.

McGoldrick & Carter (1989) pointed to the exclusion of natural parents and the emphasis on primary loyalty and cohesiveness in the new family as two of the predictors of difficulty in the transition to remarriage. The development of a secret around parentage could be seen as an extreme form of this, as the adults attempt to hold on to the idea of a nuclear family, and avoid the inevitable ambiguities and relationship issues inherent in complex systems. There is evidence for this in a study of stepparent adoptions (Wolf & Mast, 1987), in which 10% of the families planned to

conceal the adoption and raise the child to believe that the adoptive stepparent was their biological parent.

More recently, adults selected from a reliable non-clinical sample (National Child Development Study – Butler & Bonham, 1963) were interviewed about their experiences of growing up in stepfamilies at a time when this was comparatively rare (Gorell Barnes, Thompson, Daniel & Burchardt, 1998). The paternity of some informants had been concealed, and some indications as to how the revelation had affected relationships were given, although this was not the main focus of the research. One woman was described as *'very angry about the misleading information'* (p. 107), another was referred as having *'been puzzled why her half-sister not only looked so different but was more fussed over'* (p. 56). One of their conclusions was *'that deception over a single event of fact such as a child's parentage could create a culture of evasion which pervaded all aspects of family life'* (p. 275). This research did not give the accounts of the parental figures involved, and it is possible that they hoped that concealing the child's origins would enhance their sense of security and belonging, and make them better able to cope with the truth about their parentage at a later stage.

The potential for the development of such situations has been openly acknowledged in the Information Sheet 'Family Secrets' (The National Stepfamily Association 1997/8) which discourages the concealment of origins. It suggested ways to open the secret, and prepares families for possible reactions.

Donor Insemination

Families created using new reproductive technologies have to acknowledge that the process divides up the procreative role into its constituent parts – genetic and social, creating a multiplicity of ‘parents’ to be considered (Baran & Pannor, 1993; Snowden & Snowden, 1993). Donor Insemination (DI), formerly Artificial Insemination by Donor (AID) has been practised since the 1940’s, and developed with an emphasis on secrecy and anonymity (Broderick & Walker, 1995). Demand became greater in the 1970’s as the number of babies available for adoption dropped. In the UK, approximately 2,000 children are born annually as a result of licensed treatments (Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority, 1997) with more than 20,000 born before the formal records were established in 1991.

Discourses around the practice of DI have varied over the years (Haimes, 1998a). Early judgements were extremely negative – in the 1940’s there was a recommendation that the practice of DI should become a criminal offence. Reports in the public domain (The Feversham Report, 1960; The Peel Report 1973) have often given conflicting views about telling children their origins and issues of donor anonymity. Some views indicated that the baby was seen as the successful outcome of a medical procedure, while others have viewed the child (but rarely the adult he or she will become) in the context of family and society.

The Warnock Report (DHSS 1984) endorsed anonymity as a means to provide legal protection to the donor, but stated it was ‘*wrong to deceive*

children about their origins' (p. 21). In conclusion offspring were to be given limited information about the donor. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act (1990) proposed a Register of Information to be maintained by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). In the future, adults will be able enquire whether the Register contains any information relevant to them. They will have access to some non-identifying information about the donor and can be told if they are related to their intended spouse. Exactly what details will be given has not been specified, and donors have often given very limited information (Abdalla, Shenfield & Latarche, 1998; Blyth & Hunt, 1998). The anonymity of donors adds another layer of complexity into the arena, as even parents who want to be open about the means of their child's conception will not be able to help them access the identity of the man who donated his sperm making their creation possible. Given this historic context, it is not surprising that the provision of counselling for couples contemplating the use of donated gametes is available but is not a requirement. There is a virtual absence of services dedicated to understanding and supporting families created in this way.

Haimes (1998b) questioned why children created in this way should have their origins concealed by legislation in a society where information of this kind is routinely provided. She observed that the debate remains, in part, theoretical, as the secrecy '*prevents access to the appropriate data through which it might be challenged*' (p. 7). The current legal framework allows for the concealment of donor origins on a child's birth certificate as they are registered as the offspring of the mother and her husband/partner.

Curiously, in other circumstances where the issue of disclosure of genetic origins has come to Court, rulings have expressed the view that the truth is beneficial to the child's welfare (Douglas, Lavery & Plumtree, 1998).

The shared ground and critical differences between adoption and DI have been drawn out (Brandon & Warner, 1977; Lunnon, 1998), and it has been questioned whether sufficient consideration has been given to the position of the child created through the practice of DI. A common medical view is that there is inadequate evidence to support openness. A recent paper therefore concluded that individual parents should proceed in the way they think best (Shenfield & Steel, 1997).

Professionals who advocate openness raise the profile of the child's right to such information and the importance of openness about such a fundamental issue in the parent-child relationship (Landau, 1998; Speirs, 1998). McWhinnie (1992, 1995, 1996) outlined the dilemmas for parents who had opted for concealment and reported that many described that even their daily conversations were influenced by this decision. In order to help parents convey information to their young children, books about DI such as 'My Story' (1991) and others (Paul, 1998; Schaffer, 1988; Schnitter, 1995) have been written. These have helped some families share the facts with their donor offspring, so that they, like adopted children, can grow up with the sense that there was never a time when they did not know.

Research into the linked issues of secrecy and anonymity thus far has concentrated on the views of donors and parents (for example see Adair & Purdie, 1996; Brewaeys, Golombok, Naaktgeboren, de Bruyn & van Hall, 1997; Cook & Golombok, 1995; Daniels 1988; Daniels, Lewis & Gillett 1995; Lui, Weaver, Robinson, Debono, Nieland, Killick & Hay, 1995; Mahlstedt & Probasco, 1991; Robinson, Forman, Clark, Egan, Chapman & Barlow, 1991). The reasons parents gave for secrecy can be understood in terms of shameful or protective discourses, covering up infertility, anxieties about societal stigma or a wish for privacy. Some parents felt that their child would need to develop sufficient maturity to handle such complex information. The majority of couples reported that they had decided not to tell their child of his/her origins, but a number had told selected family members or friends (Cook, Golombok, Bish & Murray, 1995; Snowden, Mitchell & Snowden, 1983). This raises the potential for unplanned revelations.

There have been no systematic attempts to investigate the views of adult or child offspring, and this presents a challenge in the context of so much secrecy. Snowden *et al.* (1983) undertook a sociological study of families where at least one child had been conceived through DI. Wide ranging interviews took place with parents about their experiences of infertility, the treatment they had undergone and their views about openness and secrecy in the DI context. Eleven of the couples had children who were over 18 at the time of the study. Contrary to expectation, several had been told of their origins in what was described as a 'purposeful and planned'

way. Parents reported that they had told because they perceived '*that the children had a problem which could be alleviated by allowing the child access to minimal knowledge which the parents had about the donor*' (p. 96) and their offspring had accepted their DI status '*equably*' (p. 98). The study did not explore in detail how this information was conveyed to the young people, nor was there any attempt to elicit the views of the offspring themselves. However, the brief description given indicated that the needs of the offspring had been considered, and had influenced their parents' decision. The parents' willingness to be interviewed also implied that they had a degree of comfort in discussing the issue. However, Whipp (1998), herself conceived through DI, reported failing to contact any of the offspring, and questioned the validity of parental report in this context. She expressed concern about the motivation and honesty of those giving the information.

In their more recent book, Snowden & Snowden (1993) referred to a small group of young adults who were willing to speak about discovering their DI origins. They reported that none of the offspring had found the revelation '*particularly traumatic*' (p. 132), although many were '*surprised*' (p132) by it. Some of this surprise related to their parents' decision to keep the information a secret. Most were relieved to have been told. Their relationship with their 'social father' did not seem to have been affected, nor had close family relationships been disrupted. Some recognised the efforts that their parents had made in order to create their family, and as a result described feeling very wanted and cared for. It is difficult to assess the validity or reliability of this report, as the authors do not make clear how the

data was gathered, or how the sample was reached. No detail as to when or how the information had been conveyed was given, nor was there any information about how long the offspring had known the information prior to being interviewed. It was striking that the authors (at least one of whom was directly involved with one of the first pioneering DI clinics) indicated that offspring were uniformly positive about their experience of finding out about their origins.

In contrast, recent publications of personal accounts written by DI offspring ('Let The Offspring Speak', 1997; Turner, 1999) have indicated that the experience of discovery had been difficult, with far reaching implications personally and in relationships. Although some families were able to communicate openly, and offspring were positive about the procedure that helped create them, they conveyed strong feelings about having no right to identifying information about their donor. The strength and complexity of reactions was evident, and some were struggling with not having been told earlier in their lives. Many described the impact on family relationships, and their struggle to integrate the new information into their sense of identity.

Theoretical perspectives

Identity development

The impact of hearing that 'you are not who you thought you were', by virtue of new information about genetic parentage has never been researched systematically. Identity theory (Erikson 1956, 1959, Marcia

1987, 1988) would suggest that a considerable reworking of adult identity might result, and a challenge be experienced to other earlier stages in this model of identity development. The issue of trust and betrayal comes up in therapeutic work after the disclosure of sexual abuse secrets (Jones, 1991), where the role of the 'protector' has to be considered. There is an unspoken assumption that children expect their parents to have been honest with them about their origins, raising the question as to whether, and in what circumstances, failure to do this is experienced as a major breach of trust.

Social constructionist approach

Social constructionist ideas (Burr, 1995; Harre, 1983) have proposed that our sense of self is created in language, conversation and interaction with others. Gergen (1991) stressed the importance of other people supporting our identity and viewed the self in the context of changing relationships. Wetherell & Maybin (1996) viewed the self as '*constantly shaped and reshaped through interactions with others*' (p. 220) and this led to the idea of a 'distributed' rather than fixed self presenting and responding differently in an array of relational contexts.

The theory places importance on the stories we are told, and the narratives we develop to give structure to our lives (Sarbin, 1986; Weber, 1992), and in the process of forming our sense of self. This suggests that doubts about origins might be conveyed in the stories children are told, or by what is left unsaid. Relationships are likely to have been organised on the basis of available discourse and the appearance of a previously non-

dominant discourse may have important implications for how people relate to one another. The inherent tensions that might follow the revelation about parental identity can be seen clearly through this perspective. Given that each person in a family might be re-storying their experience on the basis of having been unaware, or reshaping the relationships on the basis of knowledge that has become open, the family context is likely to be the place where many tensions are experienced. The importance of developing narratives to make sense of difficult experiences has been clearly shown (Harvey, Orbuch, Chwalisz & Garwood, 1991).

Attachment theory

As important as the impact of revelation, is the understanding of the effects of concealment, particularly on the early relationships between children and parents. The quality of early attachment has important implications for later ideas about self and others (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Parkes & Stevenson-Hinde, 1982). A growing importance has been placed on the internal representation of the relationship formed by the infant. The coherent organisation of early experiences relevant to attachment has been shown to be crucial for the development of security in adulthood (Main, Kaplan & Cassidy, 1985). Research evidence has suggested that the ability to integrate both positive and negative elements into a coherent narrative can be linked to parenting styles.

If one or both parents have unresolved issues regarding their relationship with a child and his/her entry into the family such that a secret

develops, this could effect the attachment between parent and child adversely. Keeping origins a secret might deny the individual the possibility of making sense of what may be experienced as bewildering. Dowling (1993) pointed out that children are inclined to blame themselves when unpleasant feelings are not talked about. Without the factual information to explain rejecting or ambivalent parental behaviour, negative attributions of the self may have been incorporated, with implications for adult relationships. New information may lead to greater understanding and the development of a more coherent attachment narrative. If parents have been able to create a secure emotional environment in which the child developed resilience, a later thoughtful and sensitive revelation might be less damaging. As Akister (1998) wrote *'there is still a crucial gap in our understanding of the ways in which individual attachments operate and interact in the context of the family'* (p. 361). The impact of holding secrets on the couple's parenting has not been studied.

Rationale for this research

Most people assume that, unless told otherwise, the people by whom they are raised are their genetic parents. However, there are a number of circumstances where this is not the case, and where the truth has been concealed. Although writing from a therapeutic perspective has suggested that this can be detrimental to family relationships and individual well being, there has been no attempt to conduct research that would contribute to our

understanding of the nature of the experience for those it most fundamentally effects. This study endeavoured to take a step forward in this area.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Guiding propositions

Before embarking on this research, I spent some time reflecting upon the ideas I held and on what these were based. Therapeutic work with individuals and families, my reading of related literature and prior relevant experience of research with a single participant (Pettle, 1997) led me to the following:

- i that the revelation of previously concealed information about biological parentage would have a significant impact;
- ii that emotional reactions would vary between individuals, and over time;
- iii that participants might describe the perceived effects of revelation in areas such as self/identity, relationships with parents, wider extended family and other social relationships, sexual development and gender issues, intimate adult partnerships, views about having their own children, and feelings related to the genetic parent or donor;

- iv that the quality of the parent-offspring relationships as described by the participants, and any doubts about their biological relatedness might appear as important elements in participants' accounts;

Whilst entering the study with these ideas, I remained open to the likelihood that other elements might emerge as important when individual transcripts were analysed (Matocha, 1992).

Research aims and questions

The research aimed to explore the experiences of concealment and revelation of the identity of one or both parents. The following questions were asked:

1. Can the circumstances of secrets and their revelation be classified in a coherent way?
2. How do adults describe the experience of the revelation about their genetic parentage?
3. How do they describe the perceived effects of the prior concealment?
4. What links can be made between the circumstances of secrets and the perceived effects and experiences described?
5. What links can be made between the circumstances of the revelation and the impact described?
6. Are there any indications about how best to reveal information about origins that has previously been concealed?

Rationale for employing qualitative methodology

As this study was principally concerned with exploring participants' experiences of concealment and revelation of information about their genetic origins, and the meanings that are attached to these, a qualitative rather than quantitative methodology was considered appropriate. Such methods allow for a rigorous description and exploration, and are particularly applicable where previous research is limited (Mays & Pope, 1995; Turpin, Barley, Beail, Scaife, Slade, Smith & Walsh, 1997) and/or the research focuses on a highly complex event, process or human experience (Barker, Pistrang & Elliot, 1994). In the absence of previous research, the potential to start the process of theory building was considered a more appropriate aim than deductive hypothesis testing.

A qualitative approach focusing on interviews also enabled the participant's own meanings to be heard in the findings, and by seeking validation from them, the paradigm was sensitive to the inevitable power imbalance that exists within the researcher/participant relationship (Barker *et al.* 1994; Daly, 1992). Daly suggested the fundamental compatibility between qualitative research methodologies and the exploration of family life (even where there is only one informant), particularly given the complex interplay of individual and group elements. She posited that this allowed the researcher to look at *'interactions, dynamics, contexts rather than variables that isolate particular fragments of experience like an attitude or behaviour'* (p. 4).

Using interviews

Although interviewing raises challenges of which to be wary, such as the researchers' bias and directiveness (Britten, 1995), it offers a better opportunity to access the richness and subtlety of participant's experience and their framework of meanings (Smith, 1995). Interviews are preferable where the questions being asked are more complex and open-ended (Oppenheim, 1992). The interactive nature of interviews and the setting of an empathic context, allow for the possibility of expanding the information given by probing further or focusing on an aspect of the account given, thereby obtaining greater clarification of individuals' experiences and the meanings they attach to them. The potential to form a relationship with participants in which trust and rapport is built results in an increasing accessibility to private experiences and meanings, which would be unlikely in the context of a formal, experimental paradigm.

In this study a semi-structured interview provided the context within which participants could share their account, and the researcher could explore different aspects of their experiences, which in some cases spanned a twenty year period. Smith (1995) suggested that schedules need to be used flexibly, and outline the possible pathway that an interview might take. He emphasised the importance of rapport, and in following the participant's pacing although this may raise issues such as loss of control, increase the difficulties experienced in the analysis of data and be experienced as more personally demanding for the researcher.

Analysis

Despite the lack of published research, there was sufficient related literature to feel that a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 1995; Henwood and Pigeon, 1996) implying a position of 'not knowing' would not be appropriate. A number of ideas could be drawn from the literature and from clinical experiences, which informed the process of analysis. It was decided to use another inductive approach, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Jarman, Smith & Walsh, 1997; Osborn & Smith, 1998; Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999 in press) as it is amenable to the researcher starting from an informed position with propositions that guide the process. IPA offered a framework within which transcripts could be analysed in detail independently, focussing on each individual's understanding of what they had been through, before moving to a group level. This process is outlined in detail on page 38.

METHOD

Design

A multiple case study design was used as this offered the potential for exploring the experiences and meanings ascribed to them, and allowed the richness of the context of each case history to be considered. The study was retrospective and longitudinal to an extent. It was also quasi-experimental, in that an attempt was being made to look at the changes invoked by a 'natural' event that had occurred in the participants' lives.

Given the research topic, a prospective study would be extremely difficult to engineer. The analysis of individual transcripts using IPA allowed for a more rigorous exploration of personal stories and processes, which were then considered in terms of super ordinate themes at the group level.

Sampling and recruitment

A theoretical sample was recruited by sending details of the research to more than two hundred friends and colleagues with a covering letter (see Appendices 1 & 2). These Research Information Sheets (see Appendix 3) were also distributed at training and conference events about family secrets at the Institute of Psychiatry, Institute of Family Therapy and Devon Pastoral Counsellors. The research was also publicised through a number of relevant organisations (The National Children's Bureau, the Post Adoption Centre, NORCAP, and the DI Network). It was made clear that the aim was to recruit a non-clinical sample and therapists who made contact to discuss the possible participation of a current client, were made aware of this. Any respondent who met the criteria below was included in the sample.

Criteria for participants:

- Aged 18 or over
- Have had the experience of being told that at least one parent was not their biological parent when they were in their teens or later.
- Were told, or discovered this information at least one year ago.

In total more than four hundred sheets were distributed, and some individuals agreed to circulate them to colleagues, or pass them to people that they thought met the criteria and might be interested in sharing their story. Fifteen people responded – all but one met the criteria. Two people replied too late to be included in the study. Everyone who expressed willingness to participate and who met the criteria was included. The return rate was small, and a number of possible reasons may be postulated for this. Reaching people who have had this experience is inherently difficult, with the exception of adoptees where identifiable services facilitate this. People may regard the idea of sharing the details of a personal family experience with a stranger with understandable trepidation, particularly when accounts may be distressing, or contain aspects that have met with disapproval or a lack of acceptance in the public domain. Lastly, it may be attributable to family loyalty or the power of secrets, which may predispose individuals not to talk of their experiences even when anonymity and confidentiality is guaranteed.

Those who responded may have been particularly willing to give their accounts because of unresolved feelings about the experience, or an awareness of the difficulties that it had presented. Equally, those who were acutely disturbed by the experience may not have felt able to respond. It is also possible that individuals who felt that the information had been thoughtfully revealed, and the information easily assimilated felt less inclined to give their time to the study.

Participant details

There were twelve participants, eleven women and one man (a list can be found in Appendix 8). Their ages ranged from nineteen to fifty-seven, and the time elapsed since the revelation about their biological origins varied from fifteen months to twenty-eight years. Five participants discovered that they were adopted (one within the family); three that they were the product of donor insemination, and four that the man they had thought of as their father was in fact their stepfather and not biological related to them. Within each sub group, there was considerable variation, and brief histories are given (see pages 31-37).

Procedure

Ethical issues

As the study focused on a non-clinical population, ethical approval was sought from the Salomon Centre Ethics Panel (see Appendix 4)

Consent issues

Individuals responding to the information were telephoned to explain the nature of the research more fully and to encourage any questions to be asked. Potential participants were then sent a Consent Form in which these details were written (Appendix 5) together with a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 6). This asked for basic demographic information, details

of the participant's family of origin and current family/partnership and a brief description of the secret revealed. On receipt of these, further telephone contact was made, and a date for the interview set up at whichever venue the participant preferred. It was made clear that the research was highly collaborative, and that the researcher would return to discuss the analysis of the interview with each participant.

Before the interview began, another opportunity was given for questions to be answered, and participants were reminded that they could withdraw at any point (King, 1996). Participants were reminded that, in addition to the follow up meeting, in which the analysis of their own interview would be shared, they would be sent a summary of the results drawn from the group as a whole.

Anonymity and confidentiality

Participants' confidentiality was preserved by the changing of names and identifying details on each copy of the transcript stored on disc or printed. All data, discs and audio-tapes were kept privately and securely. Participants were aware that at the end of the study the tapes would be destroyed, or returned to them if preferred.

Consideration of the participants' well being

Every effort was made to enable participants to feel at ease with the research process. At the end of both the initial and follow up interview,

enquiries were made about their emotional state, particularly if they had been obviously upset while giving their account.

The interviews

The interviews took place in a quiet room, free from interruptions. The semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 7) offered a framework for exploring many areas of experience, individual and systemic. It was used flexibly, so that participants could tell their story in their own words and at their own pace. Interviews lasted between one and a half and two and half-hours. De-briefing included ensuring the participant's level of emotional distress before leaving and at the second meeting their views about the impact of the interview process were sought.

Many of the responses indicated that the interview had been therapeutic, and that the very fact that someone was researching this area meant that they were not alone, and that their experience had some value. Many appreciated that someone had listened, some participants described feeling perturbed – but positive about focusing on this experience in such an intense way. Further details may be found in Appendix 14.

Data management

The audio-tapes made in the first interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were read repeatedly and tapes listened to a number of times and the dominant themes identified for each individual. These analyses were then subjected to repeated consideration in order to

develop the super-ordinate themes pertinent to the group. The second interview was also taped in order that comments on the analysis and interview process could be recorded.

Maximising the rigour of research

Independent Audit

Following Smith (1999) the analysis of three transcripts were subjected to an independent audit. This required that the auditor read the complete transcript with all the annotations and followed the sequence of stages in the analytic process by reading the list of emergent themes, clustered themes and the extracts of text relating to each one. They were also given the feedback sheet prepared for participants. Through this lengthy procedure the auditors were able to determine whether the analysis was methodical and supported by the original material. In each case the auditor returned with the view that the analyses were systematic, clearly grounded in the text and that the individual accounts of themes derived from each of the transcripts was warranted.

Respondent Validity

The researcher returned to the majority of participants with the analysis, and sought their views regarding accuracy, and 'fit'. Strong positive responses were given by all. Some made comments regarding slight alterations that reflected aspects of the analysis where they felt their

perspective had not been accurately understood. This feedback was welcomed, particularly as it indicated that participants felt comfortable to respond openly and honestly to the analyses. Given the inherent power differential between researcher and participant, it is important that participants feel they can disagree. In this study, statements were made actively encouraging this as part of the collaborative and reflexive process. Distance prevented a second interview with three participants, and instead the analysis was sent to them for comment. Further details may be found in Appendix 9.

Inter-rater reliability

One hundred and twenty five quotations were extracted from the transcripts and given to an independent rater together with definitions of the six group themes. Cohen's Kappa coefficient was calculated and gave a value of 0.75. (Details can be seen in Appendix 10).

RESULTS

The results will be presented in three sections. Section one presents brief histories of each participant, the way in which the secret was revealed and the family context. These will convey something of the complexity and variety of situations in which the secret emerged. Section two outlines the analytic process (IPA) performed on the interview data and presents the group themes generated. Section three outlines a number of idiosyncratic

themes. In order to convey the tone and complexity of the participants' experiences large excerpts of verbatim text have been quoted in the final two sections of the results.

SECTION ONE: INDIVIDUAL HISTORIES

Adoptees

Martine had been brought up in France, the only child of older parents. She came to study in England, married and had children. In her late 30's, she needed a birth certificate and discovered that she had been adopted. She raised the issue with her father, who responded briefly, her mother was too ill with Alzheimers disease. Years passed before she felt able to pursue the details of her birth relatives. When she did, she found that she had been registered under a French law (sous 'x'), which allowed the details of her parents to be omitted from the records, thus making the finding of any biological relations impossible.

Edith grew up in a family with two brothers almost twenty years her senior. When she was 42, shortly after her mother died, she went to the Records Office to obtain her birth certificate, to be told that her paternal uncle and his wife had adopted her. The knowledge of her adoption was widespread through the family and neighbourhood in which the family had lived for many decades. She began to piece together the story: her mother's attempted suicide while suffering from puerperal depression, the resulting brain

damage which led to her being cared for in an institution and her father's struggle to cope with three young children in war time. She experienced a deep depression lasting over two years and at one time considered suicide. Gradually with the support of her husband and adolescent sons, she began to recover. Relationships with her adoptive 'brothers' were irrevocably changed by the discovery and they became more distant, but she became closer to her biological sisters.

As a teenager **Melanie** saw a photo in an album, dated only shortly before her birth, of her mother on cycling holiday. As there were no signs of pregnancy, Melanie began to suspect that she might be adopted. She had also noted the obvious lack of resemblance between herself, an only child, and her parents. Her tentative enquiries were met with evasion, and she picked up a message that she should not ask questions. Although she shared her doubts with people outside the family, particularly her husband and his parents, she did not seek confirmation until she was 49. She was not expecting the degree of emotional upheaval that followed seeing documents that related to her birth and adoption. The discovery of birth relatives raised significant issues about identity, and she described re-evaluating many aspects of her life.

Chrissi grew up with one much older brother. At 53, she was at the Records Office to get a copy of her birth certificate, and was told that she could not be given it because she had been adopted. This came as a total shock, years after the death of her parents. Her much older brother and his

wife had always known and despite not telling her, they had shared the information with their adult son. She immediately decided to trace her biological relatives, and became a 'detective' in the search for relations. Although her birth mother had died, she uncovered a large extended family, but has yet to be in direct contact with her sister.

Ella was '16 at the time of her parents' separation, and was told by her father that she had been adopted. Her parents feared that this information would come out in an argument with her mother's new partner who would later become her stepfather. Along with this, she had to simultaneously cope with her parents' divorce, and each of them remarrying. There was little discussion in the family. Along with her younger sister, she knew that they had had another daughter (both naturally born). She later learned that she had been placed with the family only months after this baby died. It took Ella almost a decade to seek details about her adoption, and another long period elapsed before she decided to trace birth relatives. She found that her birth mother had died, but was able to trace and meet siblings.

Donor Offspring

As a young adult, David had strong doubts about his paternity, and wondered if his mother had had an affair. When he asked her directly, she shared that he had been conceived using donated sperm. This information about the couple's only son had remained a secret from close family and friends, and his mother insisted that David did not tell his father that he

knew. However, she told him herself, and the consequences that David predicted, of being disinherited, came about. Relationships became more strained. Fifteen years after the revelation, David, an academic with an interest in comparative religion, published his autobiography, and an article placing information about his origins in the public domain. His motivation for this was to counteract negative connotations of reproductive technologies. He and his wife decided to have no children.

Fiona's parents separated when she was twelve, and four years later, as her mother was in the final months of treatment for cancer, she was told of her and her younger brother's conception with the use of donated sperm. Few people knew of this, and many older relatives found it hard to believe. It has been difficult to gain any more information about the process of her conception, and she has struggled with ambivalent feelings about being created using new reproductive technology. She has defined some tasks for herself to help resolve aspects of this experience, such as finding and visiting the clinic where her mother was treated, and reluctantly accepts that there is no possibility of finding the identity of the man who donated his sperm.

Petula was told at the age of 19, as her parents were separating, that she and her younger brother had both been conceived using donated sperm. After an initial feeling of disbelief, she felt angry that this had been kept from her, while many other people knew. She believes that her parents' relationship was affected by their decision to create a family in this way, and

that her mother used possible revelation as a weapon with which to threaten her father. She wonders if people she passes in the street might be related to her, and strongly wishes that she could trace the donor.

Stepchildren

Juliette grew up the eldest of three siblings. In her 30's her maternal aunt told her that she was the result of an affair between her mother and European nobleman. A hastily developed plan had been created in order that she married a more acceptable man, the person Juliette had always thought of as her father. The marriage had been volatile and Juliette saw her grandparents as the source of most security during her childhood. Her parents had separated and divorced twice, and then had each married another partner. After initially denying that there was any truth in her sister's story, her mother eventually confirmed it. However, eight years later, she continues to conceal the identity of Juliette's biological father. Juliette's siblings have also felt angry about the deception, and the withholding of information. There have been concerns about how to deal with the information for the next generation, particularly Juliette's own children and her 'father's' son by his subsequent marriage.

Jill was 14 when her stepfather told her in an argument that he was not her father. Jill's mother was not living in the family at the time, but once contacted was sensitive to her need to hear the story, and was supportive and open about the events that had preceded the marriage. Jill gave some

consideration, and then dismissed any shift in relationship with her siblings. In the years since this was revealed, communication between Jill and her mother has been open, her questions have been answered and her mother has made it clear that she will help if Jill wants to meet her biological father.

Rosa grew up in a large Spanish-American family, with a very close relationship with her maternal grandmother. Her mother suffered from mental health problems and was very unpredictable and volatile. At 23 she found details of her adoption by her stepfather, Enrique, along with papers indicating her mother's earlier divorce. Her mother initially denied this, but her grandmother confirmed that the documents were true, and helped her make contact with her birth father. Relationships developed with her paternal grandmother, and half siblings (children from her father's subsequent marriage). After Enrique's death, the story became more open, and Rosa shared it with friends for the first time.

Dierdre grew up in Africa, with one sister, 12 years her senior. She was often aware of her father's preference for her elder sister. After her parents divorced when she was 12, her mother remarried. At 25, in the midst of her own divorce, she went to see a therapist, who raised the issue of paternity. She immediately sought the view of her maternal aunt, who confirmed that Raoul (the man she considered her stepfather) was actually her biological father. He and her mother had conducted a long standing affair before the divorce, but that this was a secret that she was never to have found out.

Difficulties emerged in relation to Raoul's children from his previous marriage.

SECTION TWO: GROUP THEMES

Overall a total of two hundred and ninety two themes were generated from the participants' interviews. From these six main themes emerged. These are listed below.

- 1. Emotional impact**
 - Revelation as having a significant impact**
 - Emotional effects of later related events**
- 2. Identity & Self**
 - Self in the context of relationships**
- 3. Ripples in relationships**
 - In the family in which they grew up**
 - Parents**
 - Siblings**
 - In families they had created**
 - With newly found relatives**
- 4. Childhood experiences**
 - Experience of parenting**
 - Conflicted and contrasting relationships**
 - Awareness of difference**
- 5. Communication within the system**
 - The awareness context prior to revelation or discovery**
 - Family rules**
 - Communication after revelation or discovery**
 - Insistence on the secret being kept**
 - Avoidance**
- 6. Explanations**
 - Social context**
 - Meeting parents needs**
 - Protection of the child**
 - Reasons for revelation**

List 1: Themes to emerge from participants' interviews

Process by which themes emerged

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) aims to explore in detail the participants view of the topic under investigation, and is primarily concerned with their personal perception. The process accepts the need for the interpretative skills of the researcher and the analysis is therefore a dynamic interplay between these two elements. Using this ideographic approach, each transcript was treated as an individual entity before working up to super ordinate themes for the group. Each transcript was read repeatedly, and the audio-tape listened to, so that the emphases and tone were incorporated into the analyses. In line with the process articulated by Smith, Jarman and Osborn (1999, in press) initial thoughts and connections about the participants' experience were made in the left hand margin. Once this process was complete, emerging theme titles were noted in the right hand margin (for extract of annotated transcript see Appendix 11). A list of these preliminary themes together with line references was made on a separate sheet. These were examined for connections, in order to develop meaningful clusters representing higher level concepts (see Appendix 12 for examples of these stages). Feedback about the analysis was prepared for each participant (see Appendix 13 for an example).

Once all the individual analyses were complete, a master list of super ordinate themes was developed reflecting those themes that represented the experiences of the group. The feedback summary of group themes sent to participants can be found in Appendix 15. Other more idiosyncratic

themes (for example, only applicable to a sub group of participants) were noted.

1. Emotional impact

All participants described emotional experiences which they linked to the discovery of the information that their parentage was not what they had been led to believe. This category of response indicated the powerful assumption most had made regarding the identity of their parents, and how unprepared they were for such fundamental information to be suddenly revealed. They also referred to many of the ramifications of this, and shared a range of feelings about these sequelae.

Revelation as having significant impact

The sense that this kind of revelation does not fit with any usual expectation is embedded in the strength of people's experience, and in no account was there any indication that care and preparation for the telling had been taken. The repetition of narratives that described reactions conveys the profound nature of the experience. Edith referred to it as '*mind-shattering*' (7.13) and '*mind boggling*' (7.34). The struggle to absorb the information was enormous –

'And I just couldn't believe it. I couldn't take it in' (7.25),

and the psychological blow was acute –

'When I came out – it was in [x town], they must have heard me crying the other side of [x town]. It wasn't crying really, it was such a pain, ... (7.7)

There was often a struggle to comprehend both the facts and to acknowledge the inherent experience of lies and concealment.

'It was really a shock to me because I couldn't believe somebody would keep that kind of thing a secret' (Rosa 5.30)

The impact was frequently intense. Martine *'was completely panicked'* (1.35), and *'couldn't concentrate'* (1.22) and the shock manifested in a reaction which she linked to the blow to her sense of identity. She felt she could not look at herself in the mirror and,

I could not take my clothes off either, it was very very acute' (2.6)

Some participants felt simultaneously a variety of emotional responses, some more positive such as relief. More complicated initial reactions were often linked with a difficult relationship with the non-biological parent. David was stunned by the information that he was the product of Donor Insemination referring to it as *'a very shattering revelation'* (2.10). He also described another response,

I was glad to know that I'm really not the inheritor of my father's genes as my father is a very nasty person by disposition.' (2.19).

For Jill, the immediate shock was also accompanied by a set of feelings that related to her poor relationship with her stepfather.

'I think in some strange ways, I remember feeling.... pleased, isn't the right word, but sort of gratified isn't the right word, but it sort of resolved something for me' (1.28)

Dierdre described herself as 'completely stunned' (5.24) but also 'absolutely enchanted' (4.47), 'delighted' (5.12) and 'pleased' (5.19) when it was confirmed that her beloved stepfather was in reality her biological father.

Many participants experienced feelings about secret holders, and expressed anger and resentment about their failure to tell the truth, and in some circumstances actively deceive.

It hurt me that she had lied (Rosa 5.34)

I had a huge amount of resentment (Martine, 10.20)

After the initial shock many participants spoke of other emotions and responses. Edith experienced a period of acute depression as she struggled to integrate the information that she had been adopted by her aunt and uncle, who had consistently referred to the other branch of the family in negative ways. At one point she was actively suicidal,

I didn't want.... I didn't want to live, I did not want to live. My thoughts were that my husband could find somebody else. (9.43).

Emotional effects of later related events

The experiences that followed revelation varied considerably. The emotional effects often related to the responses of other people in the family, particularly the degree of ease – or difficulty with which the issue

could be further discussed. Participants described emotional sequelae extending or returning many years after the revelation.

Participants who discovered they were adopted often attempted to trace their birth families, and accessed established mechanisms for doing so. The pacing of this varied enormously, as if for some the enormity of the revelation needed to be processed before any effort to take another step could be made. Chrissi who found out at 54, immediately started to search, hoping that her birth mother might still be alive, Ella who found out at 16, waited almost a decade before asking for her documents, and then did not pursue the search for birth relatives until her mid 30's. For some, the death of adoptive parents, or their growing incapacity seemed to make it more possible to take these steps.

Those people whose wish to find out more about their genetic heritage was blocked, struggled with frustration and psychological pain which compounded feelings about the deception. Martine found her efforts to trace relatives blocked by French law and she has felt this barrier very deeply –

I dread to bring to the surface the pain attached to it all. (23.4)

It's the depth of that, the depth of the grief.....(23.9)

The inability to access information also led to feelings that were difficult to resolve for Juliette, whose only source of information was her

mother. She was left with a growing despair in the face of her mother's refusal to speak openly.

I need to know this, and I can't. And then I get very cross and angry emotions (17.38).

As I get older, or as I have known the information longer, I despair really, I really do despair. Obviously I get on with my own life and it's not affecting..... I don't know, its not affecting my everyday life, but it upsets me greatly. (24.45)

By contrast, Jill, who experienced her mother, a secret keeper, as supportive and facilitative, giving information about her biological father, felt far less turmoil.

I think that initial shock went and I didn't have any shock.... or such a negative, I didn't have any negative reactions when re-visiting it or talking about it with my mum after that initial time. It was more curiosity. (15.19)

It was apparent that feelings linked to the revelation and events that followed were still experienced powerfully by people even though years had passed. Twenty five years after the discovery, Dierdre thought she was,

Probably furious - is probably the truth but, at the same time, I sort of feel – where's it going to get me to be furious. She's dead and I didn't attack it at a time that I could have.(19.28)

Ella commented on the feelings that re-emerged from time to time, often triggered by unexpected events,

Just as I start to think that I'm feeling more, I don't know what the word is consoled and whole and, and it being settled, then something new comes up that throws me into upset. (14.5)

2. Identity and self

The revelations took away a degree of certainty that many participants had never questioned, but the impact they experienced on their ideas about self and identity varied. For some it felt like a fundamental blow, and shook the basic premises on which they had built their idea of who they were. It appeared difficult to articulate, but what was conveyed was the taking away of some essential part of self.

It shakes you... the foundation of who you are and what you thought were. You then suddenly start questioning so who the hell am I? And that's a really frightening one. (Juliette 17.32)
who went on to say -
it was this horrible realisation thatyou are a complete stranger to yourself (18.15)

I'd suddenly gained this, I don't know, new identity, I suppose, you know. There was half of me that I suddenly didn't know (Fiona 3.34)

Martine reflected on the disorientation and profound sense of identity loss that she had experienced ten years earlier. She spoke in a very slow and painful way about looking in the mirror when she could bear to do so.

It was just really a searching look because I had absolutely no idea ..[long pause].. er how I was feeling about myself anymore, ...er.. [long pause].. It's a very big blank...[long pause]... I am thinking "I am a complete question mark to myself, I am a complete enigma", you know. I thought I knew you/me but I don't. (2.16)

Chrissi, like some others, was less emotional but still felt that finding out about her origins was vital.

I don't think I rationalised it, but I think I just thought, "Well I'm not who I thought I was, and nobody's ever told me and I'm 54 years old, I really must find out who I am. (Chrissi 2.6)

Self in the context of relationships

Other participants indicated that they felt themselves dislocated from the family context, as their identity with all, or some of the family was deconstructed in an instant. Martine recounted the feeling of losing far more than the assumed connection with her adoptive parents.

My adopted father had two brothers who died before I was born but their stories of heroism and all that were certainly not my stories. (Martine 2.29)

All the lore of your childhood suddenly becomes irrelevant, you know. You don't belong in that tribe, you don't belong to that group and that is very ...isolating. (2.32)

This was echoed by David.

That means that a whole dimension of one's background melts away. All the individuals I thought were my relations, not only my father, but his brother and sister, my cousins, that whole side of my family was not really ... my family. I don't belong to them, they are genetically not related to me, whereas I thought they were. (2.5)

3. Ripples in relationships

Once information about biological parentage had been revealed, the issue of who already knew, and was therefore also a secret keeper, and the degree of open communication influenced how relationships were affected.

In adoption situations, this revelation placed the adult in a different relationship to all members of the family system. This was different from those where only one parent was involved such as DI and stepparent situations. There were also the effects on relationships in the systems of the birth parent(s) and their families, and the participants' own families. It was evident that multiple networks were affected.

In the family in which they grew up

Parents

There were many variations in how family relationships were affected by the revelation. Where parents were still alive, the effect appeared to be linked to the quality of their earlier relationship. A greater distance was created between some non-biological parents and their 'children', in some cases (like David) instigated mostly by the parent. Relationships with the biological parent could also be damaged, particularly where the issue of misplaced trust and betrayal was not acknowledged and little sensitivity to the enormity of the experience for the participant was conveyed.

Juliette's relationship with her mother had been difficult before the revelation, and was characterised by volatility and instability. The way her mother handled the emergence of the secret, and her refusal to give the identity of her father provoked her daughter's anger. The relationship was described as – '*strained, very strained,*' (29.29) as a result. Juliette had re-evaluated her views –

I genuinely thought that she had had a hard time. I felt sorry for her that she got married young, she made her mistakes but that doesn't condemn her. But now I know that I just feel this incredible resentment. Especially as I have almost pleaded with her, I have said, it is making me really sick. I'm ill, I need to know, you have no right to deny me this. (30.1)

In Jill's experience the impact on relationships worked out differently. She felt justified in increasing the degree of separation, and experienced a greater freedom in how she could feel towards her stepfather.

With Jim, as I say, in a strange sort of way, I remember distancing myself and I was quite pleased I wasn't his daughter. (8.1)

Yes, I wasn't obliged to him. He wasn't my father so.... in some ways it gave me a let out not to, I don't know, feel guilty if I didn't like him or didn't love him. It was a good reason not to, particularly for the way he told me as well. (21.5)

However, she described the revelation strengthening the relationship between her and her mother, both at the time and in the years since.

In some ways, it's drawn her and I closer together, not only as mother and daughter, but I think also possibly as two women as well. (9.22)

David experienced a lack of support from both parents, especially from his father. Given the long-standing difficulties between father and son, he had predicted that his 'social' father would react strongly to his discovering the method of his conception by DI.

I don't perceive him as other than my father, I mean he is my father. He is just a rather nasty father, but, I, I think he doesn't. This is an asymmetrical relationship – I don't think he thinks I'm his son, but I think he's my father. (4.21)

He specifically predicted that his father's obligations to him would terminate, and was not surprised when he was disinherited of the family wealth. While prepared for this, the communication embedded in this action was very powerful.

Once it was a fact, it became a fact that was known... he felt justified in disinheriting me. Which is, I mean it is a pity about the money, but it is symbolically, in a sense , worse, because what you are saying to the child that you disinherit is, "I don't want to have anything to do with you, you aren't my child, you aren't part of the family, just go away". (4.12)

Maintaining any contact with the family became a struggle as his father refused to talk to him, left town when ever he was coming to visit, and this created an enormous tension for the parental couple. David conveyed disappointment that his mother did not take a stronger position,

But she didn't stand up to him and she Just let it happen. She wanted to maintain a good relationship with me but she didn't stand in the way of this....onslaught. (10.29)

This complicated triangle inevitably led to greater distance in the mother-son relationship too, as his mother was placed in a position where she had to choose loyalties between husband and son.

It's not great [the relationship with my mother], but she didn't want to have a lot of contact with us. Because she knew it would upset her husband, and she didn't want to upset her husband. My father was very difficult. (10.36)

Siblings

There were many permutations in the families of participants. Some were singletons, while in some adoptive families there were natural-born

siblings much older, who knew the participant was unaware of their adoption status. The sibling's position as secret keeper potentially had a negative impact on the post-revelation relationship. Where the participant felt that trust had been broken, it was harder for the relationship to recover from the impact.

He couldn't handle that [situation after the discovery] specifically well (laughs) because he didn't know what way to turn, but you don't realise those things at the time. ... broke a certain bond, ... because he was, um ... what shall I say, he was kind of ... um. It broke a certain bond (Edith 8.11)

Where siblings made an effort to be more open, and understand the perspective of the participant, the initial strain could be weathered. Chrissi felt highly anxious at first, and although the relationship was still considered fragile, a positive change had been experienced.

It has, in a peculiar sort of way it has had an effect on the relationship with my brother and sister in law. We seem to be coming much closer. We talk, because my parents never talked really about anything. (5.52)

In other circumstances siblings moved to sharing only one parent in common. When participants were told in their youth and their siblings had been equally unaware of the secret, relationships remained essentially the same. Some participants reviewed relationships in the light of the information and appraised whether this affected their feelings.

It didn't actually dawn - occur to me at the time, that Rory might not be completely, you know, my whole brother, as you say. It didn't occur to me at all. It's only sort of you know, a few months later that it actually dawned that he might be my half brother but it doesn't make any difference. (Fiona 10.9)

When the revelation took place later, adult siblings had their own reactions to the information. Juliette's described how her siblings were affected by the shift in her relatedness, and by their mother's behaviour.

[They were] really upset because they didn't like the idea of me being just their half brother or sister... In fact they got really cross with my mother about it, (2.26)

My sister Florence ... she burst into tears. I think ... I don't really know why she did and I would be speculating as to why she did, but I think it was probably because.... I don't know, I am the elder sister and quite stable and I think she, it just rocked the boat. (19.18)

It was also understandable that people responded differently according to their relational positions. For Dierdre, Natalie whom she had thought to be a full sister (twelve years her senior), became a half sister. Her stepsiblings, Phillippe and Claudette with whom she had had a warm and close relationship during her teenage years, became, overnight, her half siblings, as they shared a common father. Although Natalie had strong feelings about what had happened in the family, their previous close relationship made it possible for them to talk about the issue and *'it just made yet another layer of closeness'* (13.40)

The information had little impact on Phillippe for whom it was *'uncontentious'* (16.20), but the relationship with Claudette was more complicated, and became very fraught at the time of their mutual father's death.

She felt Raoul loved me much more than he loved her and that she was extremely jealous and very, very, very hurt. (17.2)

In families they had created

Many participants had partners and children who had been affected by this experience in some way, particularly as they saw or heard about the distress the participant felt. For example, Edith's sons were in their teens, and witnessed their mother's distress as she struggled against severe depression.

Some participants had to decide how to handle the information in relation to their own children, and complicated alliances often developed. Rosa's children were expected to become secret keepers themselves. Having been instructed never to tell her stepfather she knew the truth, they had to keep their contact with their biological paternal grandfather a secret.

Well my children grew up knowing it because, and that was their grandfather too, so they, but they were told not to say anything to Enrique. (Rosa 16.47)

Melanie described the considerable impact on her marriage as she began to question her identity, after finally tracing her birth records and relatives after decades of suspecting that she had been adopted. Changes in her behaviour upset the equilibrium, and communication between them appeared difficult.

It's certainly frightened my husband who doesn't, sometimes doesn't know me, and gets very worried (21.36)

Beyond her husband, Melanie's experience also showed the ripples into her husband's family. Her suspicions about the possibility of adoption had been shared with them from the time of their courtship over twenty years earlier,

but the finding of biological relationships has disturbed the balance in this area too.

She [mother-in-law] says she's jealous because, for all these years, she's had me to herself and now she's got to share me with another family. But she hasn't had me, she hasn't owned me and there was my adoptive family. But I suppose, in her way, she was discounting them a bit because they weren't my real parents and she doesn't like Matthew, her grandson, looking like somebody else over there, so she's got to share him in a way with more people. (19.31)

Rosa's first husband found the revelation affected his view of his wife's mother. This had implications for their marital relationship, as she strove to find a position that allowed her to maintain a relationship with her mother. She experienced her husband's reaction as focussing on the deceit that he felt had been practised.

My husband said your mother's been lying to you all these years. In his head he decided that was when she was not to be trusted and everything after that, there was always mistrust or distrust or whatever, when he dealt with her. (Rosa 8.43)

With newly found relatives

For those who did pursue relatives, there was the potential for new relationships, and a number of participants described contacts with aunts, uncles, other half siblings, and cousins. These connections with biological relations seemed particularly important for adoptees. Only two people established contact with the biological parent who had been concealed, both were in stepfamily configurations. For Rosa this led to beneficial contact

with paternal grandparents and offspring from her biological father's second family.

I think the one really, really neat benefit is that I ended up with two extra sisters that I never thought I would have. One of whom I email every day. (Rosa 23.39)

For adoptees, the initial aim was to find a parent, but in many cases they had died before the search was completed. Often half siblings and sometimes an extended family network emerged. The process of incorporating these relationships often created anxieties about which family the individual belonged to, and raised a range of conflicting feelings. Chrissi's experience exemplifies this -

I find it strange that I am now a member of this Lawson family that I'd never heard of and the fact that some of them are so insistent that I am family. (29.33)

A lovely feeling really. It's a mixture of feelings -Oh my goodness, fancy them thinking that, how, how nice of them-you know. Other parts of me -oh its a bit scary- 'cos I'm not used to that sort of family and then she said "well isn't that" you know, she said "you're a Lawson" and I'm thinking "am I?". (30.20)

4. Childhood experiences

Experiences of parenting

Participants talked of a range of experiences in their early life including marital discord, significant differences in the intensity of relationships between them and each parent, an overwhelming feeling of insecurity, and abusive incidents. Without a vital piece of information about

the family and their place in it, understanding these was very difficult. Some described blaming themselves.

Juliette remembered *'an unhappy household from a really early age'* (22.29) in which she felt *'really insecure'* (4.41). But as she was growing up, she began to feel responsible for her parents' volatile relationship.

I remember at the age of 12 thinking, and not knowing and I think somebody told me – or I must have worked out that they had married when my mother was pregnant with me and I had taken the blame on my shoulders that they hated each other - or they fought like cat and dog. (4.34)

Edith was the subject of emotional and verbal abuse from members of her adoptive family, and internalised the responsibility for all the bad things that happened, even her adoptive mother's uterine cancer, which she refused to have treated.

Yeah, I thought that, and with what she died with, I thought that was my fault. My being born, I thought "that's done that". If it hadn't have been for me and that's what they're blaming me for, if I hadn't have been born, she wouldn't have suffered this. (5.35)

Conflicted and contrasting relationships

Participants often described paradoxes in relation to one parent, a degree of closeness but a lack of security and trust, or a marked contrast in the relationship with each parent – one very distant. These experiences had been hard to understand without the information about genetic origins.

The knowledge of her conception in an extra marital relationship allowed Dierdre to make sense of the ambivalence in the relationship with her mother, which was very close – but marked by insecurity.

I was very used to having, I had an extremely intense, far too intense relationship with my mother. (3.5)

I grew up in this thing of being completely panicked about whether I was going to keep my mother's love and approval (23.47)

And the information also enabled her to understand her parents' distant and superficial relationship.

So he lived downstairs, my mother, and they used to meet for meals, more or less, or social occasions, but, so I never grew up with a feeling that there was something warm particularly. (3.29)

Martine also struggled to understand her father's behaviour towards her,

My mother could not give me any attention whatsoever, without him making,behaving like a very, very hurt and jealous kid. (10.33)

And while she described the relationship with her mother as close,

I was close, I adored her and we were very, very close, and she adored me (23.25)

She was not able to tell her of her father's inappropriate sexual advance, and expected that she would take his side against her. She recounted an incident that confirmed her sense of insecurity.

I didn't feel very reassured by that, I felt that exactly affirmed, my hunch was right, there's some, I don't really....., I'm here on her tolerance and I really knew it then. I knew that..... it was definitely behaviour, behaviour dependent – if I behaved well I could stay, if I didn't, you know, God knows. (19.1)

Awareness of difference

Many participants described being aware that they looked different to other family members or were treated differentially. This often led to feelings of insecurity. Not everyone expressed an experience in which they felt they did not belong. In contrast their sense of visible connection was an aspect of their experience which explained why they had had not doubts about their parentage before the revelation.

Physically, I was matched as a babe, or my mother, my biological mother, was matched to my father, to my adoptive father, both dark, both quite tall and certain characteristics that were considered compatible, like artistic and musical broadly. And I, I grew up having a lot in common with my dad and people would say "oh you can tell she's her father's daughter – dark. Oh yes, my dad's French. "Oh yes, you look half French," so I felt reflected by him. (Ella 1.37)

I have physical characteristics of both my adoptive, both of my adoptive parents and I always used to laugh and say I've got the bad one, mum's bad ones, like her, her shortness and tendency to be overweight but not her nice eyes and her nice skin. And I've got dad's squint and long-sightedness and his fair skin that burns but not his, not the fact, the fact that he never ever put any weight on (Chrissi 2.48)

This contrasted with those who looked at one or both of their 'parents', felt the lack of resemblance, but this did not necessarily lead to conscious doubts about parentage.

They are real English rose types. They are not very big, my father isn't very tall, they are both quite slight and I'm really quite tall and very different, very dark... haired and just don't look like them at all. I never looked like any of them ...physically. So that was the first thing from a very early age I felt very different from my father. (Juliette 1.35)

The fact that we don't look alike, that we are very different. He's a scientist, and he's a surgeon, a doctor and I am not particularly scientific, not scientific and I could not be a surgeon, really I am too squeamish to be a surgeon and we just are very different. (David 1.39)

This led to a strong sense of not belonging for some like Martine,

In my case it was very acute because I thought I don't really look like them, I don't feel...I don't feel any affinity with either of them (18.4)

Although physical similarity clearly carried a great deal of significance, differential treatment and favouritism were also common experiences. Dierdre remembered how she compared the relationship she observed between her father and sister, and the one she had with him.

I mean he didn't loathe me but he certainly - it was extremely clear that he adored my sister and wasn't nuts about me. (2.40)

Rosa was the subject of differential treatment from relatives of the man she thought was her father in the Philippines, but the message carried by this behaviour was not understood until years later,

And they favoured her [another sister who was the stepfather's biological child] and they didn't favour the first three of us and so that was.... And then they kept saying "She looks like us. You're an American". (2.54)

Edith's experience was more nebulous, she had a sense of not fitting, but internalised it, and blamed herself –

I never had a clue. I don't say I didn't have a clue about feeling strange, I never felt right and I thought it was because I was so ugly, that people couldn't accept me, and that I was a disappointment, um and all sort of things like that. (3.10)

There were also memories that recount a difference that was experienced in the public domain. Chrissi, for example remembered that she did not understand why she did not do as other pupils did.

It was as I was preparing to go up to secondary school. I had to send up, take our birth certificates to school and I can remember quite clearly that I didn't go back with my birth certificate. I went back with a letter which my parents didn't tell me what was in it. They just - give this letter to your teacher- which I did do. (2.26)

5. Communication within the system

The awareness context prior to revelation or discovery

In some families the origins of the participant were common knowledge to everyone except the person themselves. This was especially the case when a baby had been adopted. Edith referred to the 'old fashioned wall of silence' (26.27) that was built up around the secret of her origins, which except for her, 'they all knew, everyone knew' (4.15).

This contrasted with DI situations where it was possible to create the illusion that the child was the naturally conceived child of the marriage. Even so, a limited circle of secret holders was common.

My parents never told me. They never told anyone about it, at least officially they never told anyone about it, but they really did because I know my mother told her sister, but she didn't tell her own mother. (David 1.23)

Mothers were often seen as the instigators of the secret, perceived as demanding loyalty from family members and friends that were informed, and as having a capacity for anger that could not be challenged.

She [an aunt] had been sworn to secrecy and you know, I mean, yes, I don't think it occurred to people to break my mother's injunctions (Martine 16.35)

Her anger was... she had a temper... and (laughs), you didn't go against it. (Edith 18.13)

Loyalties often extended beyond the parent's lifetimes. The injunction not to tell was so powerful for Edith's older brother that he felt unable to say anything, even when he knew she was heading for the Registry Office and would be told by officials. But loyalties could be complicated - Chrissi's brother felt able to tell his own son, who therefore knew before Chrissi herself, which she found hard to reconcile.

Sean, the eldest and the only son, is 43, and they told him, and said well because he's head of our family, if Bob, my brother, dies, 'cos I can't really ... agree with that. (5.5)

Family rules

Many participants experienced their homes as places where questions could not be asked, or where curiosity was not allowed. Certain areas of discussion were avoided, such as pregnancy and menstruation, as if these might lead dangerously close to the secret.

Now thinking back on it, it wasn't becauseum there was no conversation about anything really. It was cut, I realise that now. It didn't arise, it didn't arise. You didn't ask questions, um even when you come to having a period..... (Edith, 18.22)

Melanie felt there had been 'some sort of conspiracy of silence' (11.35), and after asking about details that could have led to her parents revealing her adoption status, such as,

The passport said Northampton and I did at some stage also say, "What were you doing in Northampton?" and got no satisfactory answer. So I felt a barrier in both occasions that I shouldn't ask any more, so I didn't. (1.31)

and felt that she 'didn't dare question anybody' (4.58)

Communication after discovery or revelation

The power to maintain the secret often continued in the face of direct questions. In many participants' experiences, secret holders were unwilling to acknowledge the existence of the secret at first, and denied that there was any truth in it. For the secret holders this information was not new, but the result was that the participant was denied opportunities to talk about the revelation and its impact, and ask questions.

I then confronted my mother who denied it. Just denied it – “don't be stupid”, “absolutely no way” “of course, don't be stupid”, just ... blank wall to me. (Juliette 12.2)

And she [maternal grandmother] said well I don't know anything about it, I think it is complete, absolute rubbish, your aunt is telling you complete rubbish. (Juliette 11.11)

And I actually did ask her [mother]. I said, “I've found some papers and it says something about an adoption,” and she started to scream and yell and tell me that I was a liar. (Rosa 2.6)

I talked to him (adoptive father) in fact immediately after the revelation, like, within a couple of days after the opening of the letter, I spoke to him on the phone and I said to him “you know I have just discovered that I was adopted and, you know, can you tell me more about it.” And he said, “well, there's nothing much to say, we loved you as our child and that is all there is to be said.” (Martine 3.15)

Avoidance in the family

In many families there was a strong sense that other family members, even those who had also been unaware, would rather the issue was not discussed. People who held information were often reluctant to give details, or discuss the issue. There was little willingness to hear about how the revelation had affected participants' emotionally and hardly any thought given about what it meant for them over time.

It wasn't for years after that I tried to talk to him [biological father] about it and, by then, he didn't want to know. By then, I really wanted to know the whole story. (Dierdre 9.34)

It's just sort of something that's not said really, 'cos I mean I don't mind talking about it 'cos I'm quite an open person, but my gran and she's, sort of, of the generation where you keep things quiet. (Fiona 5.36)

As a result a number of participants felt isolated in their families on this important issue,

It's all kept very ... nobody mentions it at all. It's only if I bring it up in conversation. (Fiona 14.16)

Insistence on the secret being kept

At the extreme, in some families, predominantly those of DI or stepfathers, there was a strong pressure for the previously unaware person to maintain the secret. Sometimes implicit or explicit threats were made about the consequences. This allowed the family to function as if the secret remained unopened, but raised new loyalty binds and conflicts. When Dierdre challenged her stepfather and he confirmed her paternity, she was then asked not to discuss this with her mother. In the moment she agreed, a decision she later came to regret.

"You have to do one thing for me. Please, please, please, promise me that you never tell your mother that you know this", and I said "Sure" (Dierdre 9.33)

Rosa was similarly entreated not to tell her stepfather, and lived carrying the secret until his death twenty five years later.

She [mother] said "Don't you ever tell your father that you found this out. It will kill him because he'll think that you don't love him or that he didn't love you enough. So don't ever tell him that you know." (3.22)

This left Rosa unable to confirm openly her commitment to her stepfather, and the relative lack of importance of the non-biological link. Their relationship became complicated by the pretence.

Somewhere along the years, it was obvious that my father knew that I knew but we never openly discussed it - ever. And we tried to treat each other in exactly the same way and pretend that it didn't exist. (3.28)

It took many years for Rosa and her mother to begin to talk about the family history,

About 24 or 25 years, and it wasn't until the night my father, Enrique died and it wasn't until then, till my mother started to speak a little bit about it because now she didn't have to protect Enrique any more from that or getting killed. (6.5)

6. Explanations

In the context of feeling that they had been deprived of fundamental information about themselves, participants had attempted to understand how and why the secret had developed in their family. Explanations fell into three areas: social context, meeting parental needs and as an effort to protect their child. Despite this understanding, and sometimes despite a feeling of sympathy for their parents, many participants continued to feel that the concealment was unacceptable, particularly when this extended into their adulthood. Explanations were also created for why the secret had been revealed at the time that it was.

Social context

These explanations showed awareness of the circumstances and attitudes prevalent at the time of their birth. Adoption was then a less accepted form of family creation, divorce frowned upon and donor insemination a very new procedure. There was often an implication that parents would have been advised to maintain secrecy.

I think the received wisdom was that the child would feel integrated into the family, that it would be unsettling for a child to know that the child was not really the father's son. (David 2.40)

So she was in a marriage, right. She absolutely couldn't face what it would mean to come out of it, presumably divorce was then, particularly in her kind of set up, was major. (Dierdre 10.10)

I don't know how she, or why she kept it a secret but I suppose at that time they were told to not say anything. I suppose 'cos she didn't tell a soul apart from two people. (Fiona 3.37)

Meeting parents needs

These indicated an awareness of the parents' fear of rejection, and the wish to keep up appearances.

First of all I assumed it was ...because they didn't want me ...to not love them, if you see what I mean. (Chrissi 4.10)

But I think she wanted... as a nice Jewish middle class, upper middle class suburban housewife, she wanted to present the family as normal... She didn't want people to gossip about her, or her husband, and she wanted just to be a nice, happy, ordinary Jewish family. (David 5.49)

Protection of the child

Participants acknowledged that the motivation for secrecy might have included some concern about them, and represented an effort to protect them.

I also assume, because it was in the war and just after the war, that even adopted children, it was a stigma. I've read that since in books I've read about adoption, that if other children found out, they used to call names even though it's not your fault. I presume that's something to do with it. (Chrissi 4.12)

The motive makes a difference. So certainly I don't think my parents ever wanted to hurt me. They did it because they thought it would be better. (David 24.33)

Reasons for revelation

Where revelation had occurred directly through being told, it was striking that the participant perceived that the circumstances demanded this. Imminent parental separation or divorce, and terminal illness were often times when the information was shared. There was no sense that the revelation followed a thoughtful decision based on the 'child's' right to know and that the likely impact had been considered.

My dad and my mum decided that I needed to be told that I was adopted at this stage, 'cos they were scared that I'd call him [mother's lover] a bastard and that he would turn round and, in an angry moment, and say, "Well you're the one that's a bastard". (Ella 1.23)

This was particularly so when the informant was a stepparent or other relative, when the revelation was seen as a function of the other persons frame of mind and had a destructive element.

Because she [my aunt] was cross with her mother and her sister at that particular time because her life wasn't very going well. And people can be like that. (Juliette 4.23)

I think it was because I related to my mother and I think the argument started about me standing up to him for some reason but I think he translated the anger he had towards my mother towards me" (Jill 3.35)

SECTION THREE: IDIOSYNCRATIC THEMES

When the subgroups of DI offspring and stepchildren were studied, three idiosyncratic themes emerged which were not relevant to the group as a whole, but appeared sufficiently significant to report here.

Chance result of technology

Those people learning of their conception through donor insemination conveyed a sense of feeling depersonalised, and that hearing as they did failed to convey any sense of having been created in the context of a loving relationship.

Because it was all this new technology and, you know, if it hadn't been for that, then I wouldn't be here and then, if she hadn't gone to that place in Bristol, and if they hadn't chosen that particular donor, then, you know, I wouldn't exist (Fiona 5.8)

I believe I should have always known from the time I was able to hear. I might not have felt so lied to and like an experiment. (Petula 2.20)

I didn't have any choice in this. I was born out of a bottle. I'm a product of artificial insemination. (David 9.41)

Shame

The issue of shame was raised by DI offspring in relation to their means of conception. David's view of DI contrasted with that of his mother,

There is nothing to be ashamed of, there's, you haven't done anything wrong, it is not a dirty secret. But my mother couldn't see it, and it was just horrifying that her friends would discover that this was so. (5.31)

He went on to think of circumstances that he felt she would be right to feel ashamed of, indicating that keeping it a secret placed it in the same category as a crime.

If my father had been a bank robber and had gone to prison, and, you know my mother would have lost face in the community for his being, you know, let's say he murdered various people and he was a rapist, you know, I wouldn't have told everybody, but it wasn't like that. There's nothing wrong with it. (16.27)

This tendency for the secrecy to convey shame was echoed by Fiona,

It was as if I sort of felt ashamed really. I don't know why I felt ashamed, but I just did. Because I wasn't. I felt I wasn't normal. I wasn't, I didn't think, you know, everybody else had got, you know, they knew who their mother and father were and they were normal and stuff, and then I suddenly found out, and I suddenly was abnormal and it wasn't right (15.5)

Supportive secret keepers after revelation

The openness and support on an adult who had previously been a secret keeper emerged as a theme in the less complicated stepfamily configurations. This relationship, in which the subject could be easily raised,

questions asked and information given, appeared to be a significant help in the process of integrating the new facts.

For Jill, this person was her mother, who was able to be sensitive, and follow the pace of her curiosity over the years.

So I think we spoke about it in little sort of spats, I suppose, as and when. She was very, she was quite comfortable to do it. I'd ask as much as I wanted to know and she wouldn't volunteer anything that I didn't want to know or whatever. So again when I was about 18-ish I think, and again in my mid-20s and quite a bit more, at roughly sort of five year periods and a bit more in my, quite a lot more in my 30s. She told me more about my real father, and where he lived. (11.17)

As her mother openly shared her earlier experiences, Jill developed a greater understanding about the context of her birth, and mother's decision to keep her at a time when single motherhood was not such an acceptable option as it is today. She was therefore able to appreciate her mother's dilemma, and accepted that she had intended to tell her at a later date.

And I also felt quite proud that she was sort of fighting for me or had fought for me, if you know what I mean, in terms of her generation (5.25)

Despite her mother's unwillingness to discuss the issue, Rosa received a very different response from her maternal grandmother, who had maintained contact with her biological father's family over the years. She offered her a balanced view and practical help to facilitate a meeting.

And she says "Do you want to contact him?" and I said "well sure". So my grandmother, this is my maternal grandmother of course, gave me the phone number and maybe the next day, I called the phone number and my biological father answered the phone. (1.34)

Adoptees search for birth families

The narrative of their personal journey to trace and sometimes meet birth relatives was a powerful theme for adoptees. But as this has been the subject of much research, it will not be reported here.

DISCUSSION

Discussion of the results

This study was concerned with how people described the perceived effects of the prior concealment, and later revelation of details about their genetic parentage. It aimed to explore links between the circumstances of secret-making and the perceived effects and experiences described, and the circumstances of the revelation and the impact described. It additionally asked if any coherent classification of these types of secrets could be made and if there were any indications about how best to reveal information about origins that had previously been concealed.

Classification of secrets

It was clear that any attempt to classify these secrets further would need to consider a multiplicity of factors. These included whether the identity of one or both parents was concealed, whether details about the biological parent(s) were accessible, and if accessible, whether this was through a clearly defined route or subject to the willingness of others, and if withheld, whether this was by family members or by legislation. In relation to revelation, the issue of planned, as opposed to unplanned telling appeared to be a potentially significant element. There were no carefully planned revelations in this sample, so it was not possible to look at how this might influence the nature of the experience. Unplanned revelation could be divided into personal and impersonal, the latter referring to the discovery through documents.

Major themes

Six main themes emerged from the analysis of the data. These were -

1. The immediate emotional impact and the ongoing emotional repercussions.

Although all participants used language that conveyed the shocking nature of the revelation, one third indicated that this experience had been profoundly traumatic and had precipitated a crisis of some kind. The information and its implications created a significant long term emotional issue for five of the participants, and re-emerged as an issue much later,

sometimes unexpectedly, for another three. Four participants (none of them adoptees) additionally described positive aspects of their response to the information, but this did not necessarily prevent it from being an issue that they struggled with. In three of the accounts reactions to the information were complicated by other experiences such as imminent parental separation or death.

2. The effects on individuals' sense of identity and their sense of self in the context of family relationships.

Comments about aspects of identity affected by the experience were made by all but two participants, and this issue was a significant one for two thirds of the participants.

3. The ripples that occurred in relationships within the many family systems of which they were a member

All participants described relationships affected by the revelation, most frequently in terms of difficulties and tensions. The extent of these varied depending on the family context – those who were only children or whose 'parents' were deceased gave fewer examples of the relational consequences than others did. For six participants the revelation had consequences in relationships in a third generation, with either grandparents or children of a subsequent generation being affected. Half of those interviewed had experienced significant relationship issues with one or more

family members. Three participants referred to positive post-revelation changes in at least one relationship, such as greater intimacy and more open communication.

4. Their childhood experiences, particularly of parenting, conflicted and contrasting relationships with and between parental figures, and the experience of feeling different.

This theme emerged very strongly from the transcripts of eight participants, who described powerful experiences from their childhood that they linked with the concealment.

5. Communication about the secret within the system both before and after revelation.

This theme was evident in all the transcripts, with eight participants describing the powerful injunctions on communication both before and after the information was revealed. Only two participants perceived that at least one family member was willing to communicate openly with them immediately following the revelation.

6. Explanations for secret keeping and revelation.

Participants often gave a number of different explanations for why the truth had been concealed. The most common, conveyed by ten participants was

the view that parents had considered their own needs at the expense of their children's. Six participants considered that the social context was an important factor in understanding their parent's decision, and four raised the likelihood that their parents had wanted to protect them in some way. Only five of the twelve participants were given the information personally by a member of the family. Where there was not a contextual explanation that helped them to understand why that moment had been chosen for the revelation, destructive motivation was implied.

These themes supported the suggested relational consequences of both secret keeping and later revelations proposed by systemic therapists. Embedded within the participants' perceptions of childhood were implications for their attachment experiences with one or both parent figures. The revelation offers a particularly salient connection with ideas of 'internal representation' from attachment theory. The experience challenges the basic building blocks upon which later relationships are based. Participants' emphasised the impact on family relationships, but rarely commented that other social networks had been affected. The consistency and support of friendships, colleagues and partners appeared to be helpful in the face of such a fundamental challenge to their sense of self. The impact of unplanned discovery was considerable, and it raised the possibility that planned telling by one or both parent figures might serve to reduce the experience of insecurity, and allow the individual to access support from these key people. In contrast, being told as a young child may allow attachment to be based on an authentic understanding of the nature of the

relationships involved, and the information incorporated into identity as it is developed.

Given the small number of participants in each sub-group, no clear differences between how people processed the revelation were apparent. However, available pathways and people's reactions channelled participants in different ways. The themes were interwoven in complex and idiosyncratic ways marking out the particular journey for each individual. The family context, dynamic interplay of relationships and unique details in each story combined to form a set of unique circumstances that influenced the process for each individual.

An analysis of themes inevitably leads to a fragmentation of accounts, with different aspects of beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and explanations being drawn out. Events that were remembered as having occurred also formed an essential part of the narrative. It is important to synthesise the information, weaving together themes to form a sequence connecting events and the feelings and meanings given to them.

A tentative model

The set of experiences studied was sufficiently complex that a number of theories needed to be considered in order to understand the processes that might underpin them. A tentative model is proposed to illustrate the pathway from revelation towards the integration of new

information about genetic parentage. The order and duration of each aspect may vary considerably for each person. These are outlined below:

- a) The initial crisis: immediate thoughts and feelings about the new information and its' personal significance.
- b) Reflections on deception and concealment.
- c) Deconstruction and reconstruction of existing relationships in the light of new information.
- d) Re-evaluation of earlier experiences, creating explanations and giving meaning to the experience.
- e) Efforts to complete the narrative by accessing more details: technological information for DI offspring, the tracing and/or meeting birth relatives (where possible).

a) Initial crisis

The revelation that someone you believed was your mother or father is not your parent was experienced as an immense blow to an individual's psychological world. The information presented fell outside the individual's existing construct system. Participants described an initial reaction not unlike the experience of being given the diagnosis of serious illness (Davis, 1993). However, in contrast to events that carry the power to change the shape of the future, this revelation carried considerable ramifications for the past as well. Participants conveyed that their previous sense of identity could not be easily replaced even when details about the biological parent

were provided. This confirms the importance of the 'internal representations' suggested in attachment theory, and shows that a degree of disorientation is likely to follow if they are proved to be false. In relation to social constructionist ideas about identity, many of the stories and interactions that have built the elaborate idea about self and relationships have been removed in an instant. This shock was evident even when doubts had been expressed or the content of the revelation was welcomed.

b) Reflections on deception and concealment

In the process of adaptation it appeared important that others had known this significant information before being revealed to participants, and thus, unlike an illness or traumatic event, was not new to all concerned. It was important to trace how widely the truth was known within and beyond the family. Participants reflected on the times they had been actively lied to or deceived by those they had trusted.

When reflecting on the previous concealment, there was a strong sense in which participants had connected confusing childhood experiences and explained them in the light of the new information. Feelings of insecurity and not belonging were often reported, and from the data one could speculate that both the marital and parent-child relationships had been affected by the circumstances of the child's entry into the family. The child's perceived experience of not being cared for was repeated in adulthood, when feelings about how the revelation took place again raised feelings of not having been considered.

c) Deconstruction and reconstruction of existing relationships in the light of new information

There was some indication that changes could follow the revelation in relationships with both biological and non-biological parents. A greater distance in the relationship with non-biological parents (often fathers) was common, and frequently reflected prior difficulties. Mothers were often viewed as the source of the demand for secrecy, with fathers portrayed as being compliant. This harder view on maternal figures echoes the findings in stepfamily research, where the standards for stepmothers were seen as more demanding than for stepfathers (Gorell Barnes *et al*, 1998). This gender bias may reflect the general expectation for the woman to be the primary caregiver and the implicit discourse in participants' accounts that they expected honesty about their origins.

The behaviour of people in response to the reactions of the participant (and vice versa) forms a complex interaction forming a basis for future relationships. This too will be influenced by another level of context, that of the societal views of different circumstances. Interactions were often made more difficult by the wish of other family members to keep the previous dominant discourse. Reluctance to acknowledge the impact and implications for the individual may lead to a lack of resolution in a number of important family relationships. It is important to recognise that other members of the system, including the secret keepers, will be affected by the disclosure of information, and may fear that this will extend beyond immediate family. As the person who was the subject of the secret,

participants consistently indicated that they felt their feelings and rights had been ignored both by the concealment and post-revelation.

d) Re-evaluation of earlier experiences, creating explanations and giving meaning to the experience

Perhaps as a way of making sense of their experience participants entered into a process of trying to understand the motivation for secret keeping and to make manageable what felt emotionally incomprehensible (Bruner 1990). They were often able to view their parents with some compassion, and as victims of their own times and the prevailing social and cultural expectations. Some could see that their parents' motivation had not been to hurt them, and indeed offered a degree of protection to them whilst very young. But it appeared to become increasingly difficult to understand a rationale that was to their benefit when secrecy extended well into adulthood. It became almost impossible when it was clear that revelation was never intended, for example when it occurred well after the parents' death.

Significant relationships, past and current actions are all the subject of re-evaluation, and take on new meanings. Cronen & Pearce (1985) proposed a model that may be useful in conceptualising this shift. In their work they conceived of meanings being hierarchically organised so that one level (for example: this man is now not my father) is the context for the interpretation of the others (how we relate to one another). The

discontinuous shift in the form of parental identity appeared to influence the meaning of past and future actions of significant people in the family system.

e) Efforts to complete the narrative by accessing more details

This drive to create a new narrative about coming into being also fits into the social constructionist model. Where the identity of a parent is unavailable or inaccessible, other aspects of the story may assume importance, such as information about the relationship, or the place and procedure that was entailed. Adoptees were the only group who had the right to information about their origins, and a clear route by which they could pursue this. Post-adoption services provide a blueprint for how to proceed after the discovery and pursue the wish to know more about one's history. The need for details appeared important to most people, but the process for doing this is much less clear for stepchildren and DI offspring. At the societal level there are no accepted discourses regarding such revelations, or the process of integration.

Beyond the individual

This study focussed on the perceptions of the previously unaware, but it raised some ideas about parents in this situation. Reder & Duncan (1995) explored the 'meaning of the child' and showed how this can be linked with subsequent parenting in relation to child abuse. In situations where secrets have developed, it is possible to speculate that a concealed non-biological relationship or unresolved feelings about the circumstances

of conception will affect the psychological meaning that a child holds. If this is translated into behaviour, early attachment relationships may be affected, and elements of the parents' feelings played out throughout the child's development.

Possible indicators for reducing the impact of revelations

In the context of unplanned revelations, these findings suggested that a positive factor was the support of one person who had previously kept the secret. This openness appeared to help and was reflected in the accounts of two participants who implied that the issue had been resolved more quickly as a result, and that it was less often a source of discomfort or difficult feelings. This was regardless of whether the participant chose to take the step of meeting the previously concealed parent. Many of those who were already aware, may have experienced feelings of awkwardness, guilt or shame after the facts were revealed that contributed to their view that discussion was best avoided. This response only served to intensify the difficulties for the subject of the secret. It raised the importance of other members being willing to keep communication open, to hear about the effects and thoughts that the revelation has provoked, and to work towards relating on a different basis.

The findings tentatively suggested that some factors might be seen as having the potential to reduce the initial trauma and limit the negative repercussions of an unplanned revelation. These were:

- the development of open communication in the family,
- the existence of a supportive secret holder,
- being told when younger (i.e. a teenager).

Those factors that appeared to potentially increase the level of distress and exacerbate repercussions were:

- receiving the information impersonally,
- past deliberate deceptions including denial in the face of direct enquiry,
- the revelation happening at the same time as another major life event or crisis (e.g. death of family member, parental divorce or separation)
- immediate denial after revelation,
- continued avoidance of the issue,
- information about the biological parent being inaccessible.

Implications for clinical practice and future research

There are a number of different levels at which these ideas could be translated into actions in the clinical domain, in both individual and family therapy, and in the preparation and support of families planning to create their children through donated gametes.

Therapeutic interventions post-revelation

Where an individual seeks therapeutic help, it appears important to work with both their internal world and the family context (Boscolo & Bertrando, 1996). It may be important to explore the impact and

repercussions for the individuals' current partner and children, and acknowledge the individual's membership (real and psychological) to another family system as work with adopted children has done (Rustin, 1999). The importance of telling and re-telling the story and developing a new narrative about self and family may serve an important function in itself, both in therapy and with others. Clients with a limited social network to support them may find the impact of the revelation more difficult to overcome.

Alongside support for the individual trying to make sense of these internal and intergenerational repercussions, a focus on relationships between family members may be particularly helpful. Providing a safe enough context where the range of perspectives and experiences can be heard might facilitate the beginning of the process of constructing new relationships. Considerable effort might be required to engage those preferring to avoid facing the issue and their part in the creation and/or maintenance of the secret. A position of therapeutic neutrality (Cecchin, 1987; Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin & Prata, 1980) would enable the therapist to avoid strong alliances with any one person. Compassionate empathy for the dilemmas and experiences of individuals in each position in the awareness context, and an understanding of the wider social and cultural context would be essential if there is to be a possibility of creating a therapeutic conversation in these circumstances (Andersen, 1992; Anderson & Goolishian, 1988).

Preventative work: helping towards 'planful' telling

These findings suggested that unexpected discovery of such fundamental information is distressing and has far reaching repercussions through relationships and over time. Participants indicated that they would prefer to have been told in a way that made them feel that their feelings had been considered. Where clinicians are privy to the knowledge that a family is holding such a secret, consideration should be given to the question of whether it is ethical not to offer secret holders an opportunity to reflect on their decision. Sessions could help to examine both the effects of revelation and continued secrecy, the likelihood of an unplanned revelation and its' potential damage. Although clearly the decision rests with those holding the information, it is possible to offer support through the opening of the secret and beyond.

This issue seems especially salient, as the HFEA Register of Information enabling young adults to find out if they are donor offspring becomes accessible in the next decade. This may perturb families who opted for secrecy to re-examine their decision, and there are currently no dedicated services to support people in these circumstances.

Educational approaches

While the potential effects of secrets about genetic parentage need to be shared with families where this might occur, it seems particularly important to raise these issues with couples considering gamete donation. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act (1990) does not place the

child's welfare as 'paramount' like The Children Act (1989). Unlike the field of adoption where prospective parents are scrutinised and there is a time for mixed feelings to be worked through, in the reproductive technologies the decision to go ahead with treatment rests with the couple (Curruthers, 1997). Concerns expressed by those involved in counselling couples may be overridden (Clark, 1998; Micioni, Jeker, Zeeb & Campana, 1987,). A fuller exploration of the implications of both secrecy and openness might be helpful to couples at an early stage, and reduce the potential for unplanned revelations in the future.

If the perspective of adult donor offspring becomes the subject of more research, the effects of openness and secrecy will be better understood. This may prompt a review of current practice in this area of infertility treatment.

Future research

As there has been little research in this area, there are many possible directions. A similar study with a larger sample would clarify whether the themes and processes reported here are common. A longitudinal study of people who have had this experience might be advantageous and would improve our understanding of the process without the problems of retrospective data. If a sample could be drawn from those who had experienced both planned and unplanned revelations this would enlarge our understanding of how the circumstances of finding out this information influences later events.

Studies that allowed for comparison between those told of their origins from an early age and those told later could give more information about the effects of concealment on family relationships and on the process of integrating such fundamental details into the formation of identity. This may be particularly helpful in addressing some of the dilemmas raised in the field of gamete donation in assisted reproduction. Given the significance of attachment in early development, further exploration of the relationships in families with donor offspring, whether choosing openness or opting for concealment, might give important information.

Reflections and criticisms

Discussion of methodology

Using this methodology and focussing on a limited sample has meant that generalisations can not be made on the basis of these findings. However, the aim of the study was to use the richness of the data to deepen the understanding of the personal and social processes under examination. Respondent validity (see Appendix 9), independent audit and inter-rater reliability measures together give credibility to the results.

One of the strengths of the interview context was that participants were able give their accounts, which were often long and detailed, at their own pace. Despite using the interview schedule, many participants gave their account in a flow that I felt it would be unhelpful to interrupt. The

interview schedule was then used as a way of checking whether all the relevant areas had been covered and prompting further questions about aspects that had not been mentioned. This in effect prioritised the individual's account, and organised it less, and probably limited the effects of any respondent bias.

Those who come forward to be interviewed appeared to feel that taking part offered an opportunity to have their experiences validated. Some expressed an altruistic desire and hoped that this might be helpful to professionals who were in contact with people in similar circumstances. It was possible that people who were told in a planned supportive manner felt less like participating, although the information sheet made clear that all circumstances were of equal interest.

The predominance of women in the sample reflects difficulties found by other researchers (Daly 1992). It is often difficult to gain access to men's perspectives of family life, as they are traditionally hard to recruit. The inclusion of two further men was rendered impossible by their lack of availability within the time scale. As a result gender differences could not be explored.

When I returned with the analysis, participants talked of the process having been beneficial and finding it therapeutic. Other qualitative researchers have reported similar responses (Daly, 1992; Gilgun, 1992). Many participants had never been in a counselling relationship and said that

talking through it helped them make new connections, and gave them further insights into relationships.

Limitations of the method

Retrospective studies suffer from a number of drawbacks: other people involved with key events might report the 'facts' very differently and participants' might selectively focus on some aspects of their experience and ignore others. Research based on self-report about past experiences does present a potential source of error and bias. Perceptions of relationships change over time, and may be easily changed by event as big as this. However, participants often clarified that they had feelings and experiences long before the revelation, and were able to articulate when they had revised views afterwards. Also, as the study was primarily aimed at understanding their experiences, the 'truth' was not the focus. However, in future studies it might be useful to validate key events in the account by getting data from others within the family system, although perspectives are likely to differ.

Reflexivity

During the interviews I was aware of the challenge of being a researcher, particularly as a therapeutic role was more familiar. I experienced strong emotions while conducting this research. I was moved by participant's accounts, their struggles and distress. While I endeavoured to maintain the research position (Matocha, 1992), I was also supportive and compassionate. I was careful to monitor the impact of the research

experience, and of my own responses about the research process using a research diary (see Appendix 16). This process was also facilitated by discussions with a therapist completely outside the research framework. This opportunity to reflect on the personal-professional overlap helped me to remain more objective about the research process.

I found the attention to detail in the analysis of transcripts very rewarding, but a great contrast to therapy. It confirmed how much the therapeutic process allows for the exploration of nuance, the struggle to find words and how the ongoing relationship creates a space where ideas can unfold. I initially found the process of drawing significant themes for each individual very difficult as it sometimes felt as if I was denying aspects of their experience. This arose again as I moved from individual stories to group themes. Finalising the themes was a powerful punctuation, and I have been acutely aware that the information I have presented here reflects only some of the possible interpretations emerging from the interview data.

Language

At times while writing this dissertation, I have been aware of how clumsy the language appeared, and how lengthy some explanations seemed. I remembered that in some interviews participants said that they did not know how to use language to distinguish between people and their roles, and how this was the first time they had tried to put some aspects of their experience into words. This was so even for the adoptees, who found it a struggle to re-label people in a way that was comfortable. Perhaps my

experience and that of participants reflects how little this subject is discussed in the public domain, and how as yet an easily accessible way of speaking of such events has not been constructed.

Confidentiality and ethical issues

All participants were assured that identifying details would be changed, but I had not anticipated some stating that this felt uncomfortable, or was unnecessary. On reflection, given the lies and deceptions that they had experienced, it was not surprising that honesty and openness had become important principles by which they had chosen to lead their lives.

Giving the account evoked emotional distress in a number of participants. My response was to be thoughtful, sympathetic and accepting. If it felt appropriate, they were reminded that they could postpone or stop the interview. Their usual response was to choose to continue the interview, and a number remarked on the positive effect of being able to show their feelings.

Qualitative researchers are often asked for information, or advice by the participants and the degree to which they can respond is related to training and ability (Daly, 1992). In this study, I chose to wait until after the second meeting to address questions that had been raised, or give information about accessing therapeutic help.

CONCLUSIONS

Although this study has limitations, the findings present the beginning of the mapping of people's experience after the revelation of previously concealed information about biological parentage. The emphasis was to examine the personal experiences and meanings in a small non-clinical heterogeneous sample. The six main themes generated from the analysis encompassed both intra-psychic experiences and the impact on identity, and effects that were evident in relationships through many related parts of the family system. Additionally, participants' experiences indicated that they perceived concealment of the information to have had a powerful effect on family life and communication. This effect on what could and could not be talked about continued beyond the revelation, and seemed to permeate relationships within the family. A tentative model drawing on a number of theoretical ideas for examining different aspects of the process of integration of the new information was proposed. Implications for clinical work and further research were suggested.

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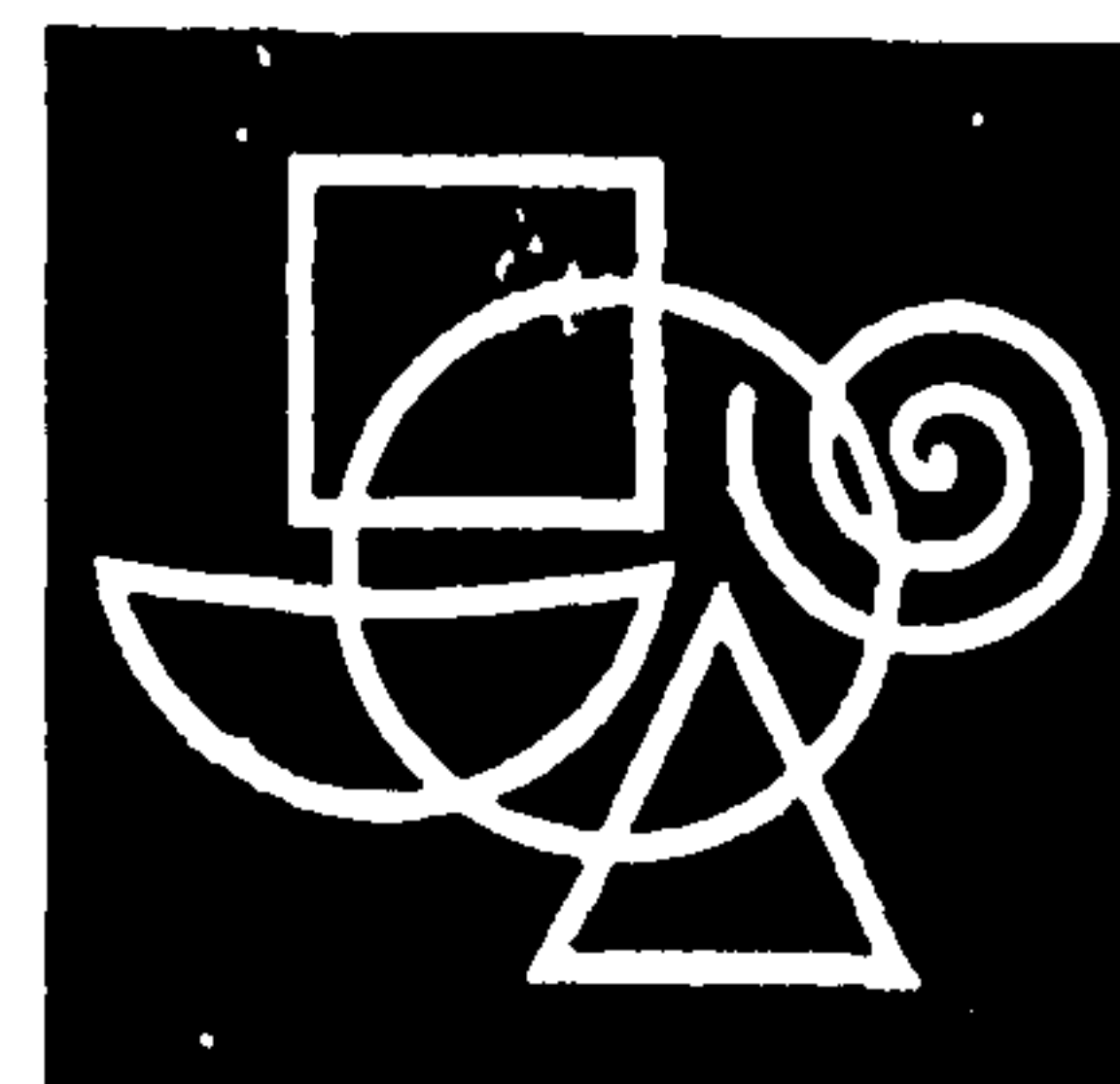
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Appendix 1. Covering letter to clinicians

Salomons Centre
David Salomons Estate
Broomhill Road, Southborough
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Kent TN3 0TG

Telephone: 01892 515152
Facsimile: 01892 539102



SALOMONS
CENTRE

e-mail spettle@tenprioryave.demon.co.uk

21st August 1998

Dear

I am contacting you with regard to some research that I am currently undertaking as part of a Post-Qualification Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the Salomons Centre. This is an accredited institution of the Open University and is part of Christ Church College, Canterbury.

The area I have chosen for investigation is an important but difficult area - that of family secrets. In particular, I am interested in secrets regarding biological parentage. One of the challenges is to reach individuals who have such an experience and who fit the criteria. Although I will be advertising nationally, and have contacted adoption and stepparent organisations, I am also circulating the information personally.

I want to emphasise that I am not asking you to think of clients, but, if appropriate, to make this study known to colleagues, friends or members of your extended family. Please feel free to photocopy the Research Information attached. If you know someone who might fit the criteria and is a potential participant, and you want to discuss the research, please telephone me at work on 0181 846 7806.

It is important that you know that I will not ask any potential participant who contacts me where they heard of the study. So far, I have conducted a small piece of research in this area and the feedback from this and some recent interviews was that the research offered a helpful opportunity to reflect on the experience.

I believe that this is an important area to explore, particularly given the ethical debates about assisted reproduction with donated gametes. If you are able to assist in the networking of information which may lead to a greater number of participants, I would be extremely grateful,

Many thanks for your help,
Yours sincerely,

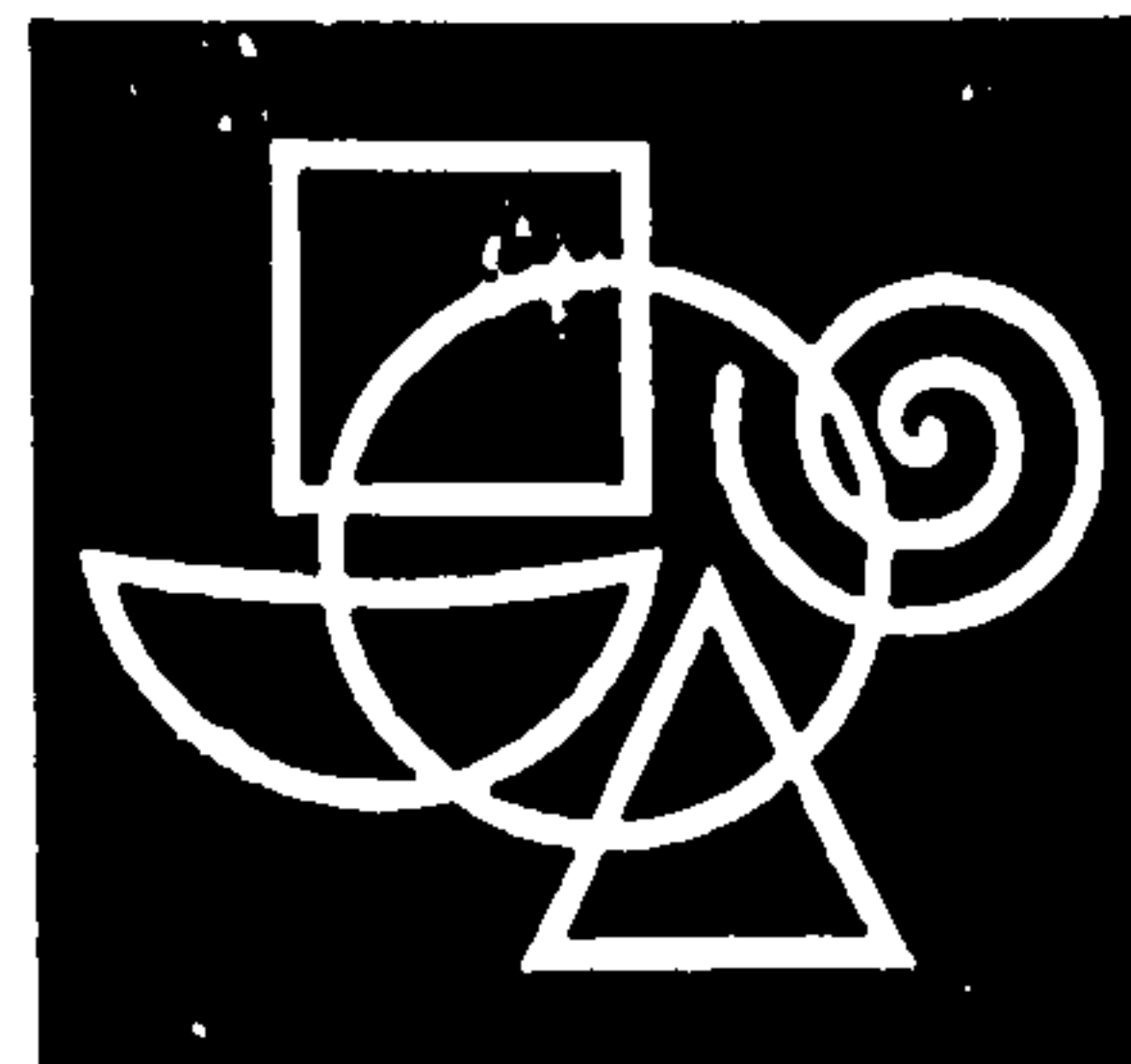
Sharon Pettle
Consultant Clinical Psychologist

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Appendix 2. Covering letter to non-clinical colleagues and friends

Salomons Centre
David Salomons Estate
Broomhill Road, Southborough
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Kent TN3 0TG

Telephone: 01892 515152
Facsimile: 01892 539102



**SALOMONS
CENTRE**

e-mail spettle@tenprioryave.demon.co.uk

21st August

Dear

I am contacting you with regard to some research that I am currently undertaking as part of a Post-Qualification Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the Salomons Centre. This is an accredited institution of the Open University and part of Christ Church College, Canterbury.

The area I have chosen for investigation is an important but difficult area - that of family secrets. In particular, I am interested in secrets regarding biological parentage. One of the challenges is to reach individuals who have such an experience and who fit the criteria. Although I will be advertising nationally, and have contacted adoption and stepparent organisations, I am also circulating the information personally.

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I believe that this is an important area to explore, particularly given the ethical debates about assisted reproduction with donated gametes. If you are able to assist in the networking of information which may lead to a greater number of participants, I would be extremely grateful,

Many thanks for your help,
Yours sincerely,

Sharon Pettle
Consultant Clinical Psychologist

nc/98

Appendix 3. Research Information Sheet

Research Information: 'Family secrets about biological parentage'.

I am an experienced clinical psychologist and family therapist with a particular interest in family secrets, undertaking this research as part of a post-qualification doctorate degree. I am interested in the experiences of people who discovered in their adolescence or adulthood that at least one of the people they thought of as their parents, was not in fact their biological parent.

There are a number of situations in which this might have occurred. For example, children created using donated sperm, where stepparents have been presented as biological relations, or where a relationship outside an on-going partnership resulted in a pregnancy. Additionally, although many people adopted in infancy have been brought up knowing this, there may be some individuals for whom this was not the case.

To participate you must be over 18, and have had this information revealed to you at least a year ago. Being part of the research will involve two interviews, in which you will be encouraged to tell the story of how you found out, and the experience of this information becoming known after it had been concealed. My aim is to understand how the experience has affected you and your family, and your relationships. The first interview will last about an hour and a half. When we meet again 4 - 8 weeks later, I will share a summary with you, and ask for your comments. I will want to check whether you think it is accurate and makes sense to you. I will also want to ask you some questions about the experience of being interviewed. When the research is completed I will send you a copy of the main findings. Interviews may take place in your home or in London. Any travelling costs will be reimbursed.

The interviews will be recorded on an audiocassette machine so that I have an exact record of your words. All the information you share will be treated in complete confidence, and the tapes and typed transcripts of the interviews kept safely. The tapes will be destroyed one year after the research is complete, or given to you, if you prefer. In writing and presenting the research, all names and identifying details will be changed.

I am interested to hear from you, however this occurred in your family, and whatever your reactions. If you might be willing to participate, or want more information before making a decision, please contact me :

**Sharon Pettle / Clinical Psychology
Salomons Centre
David Salomons Estate
Broomhill Road, Southborough
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Kent TN3 0TG,
United Kingdom**

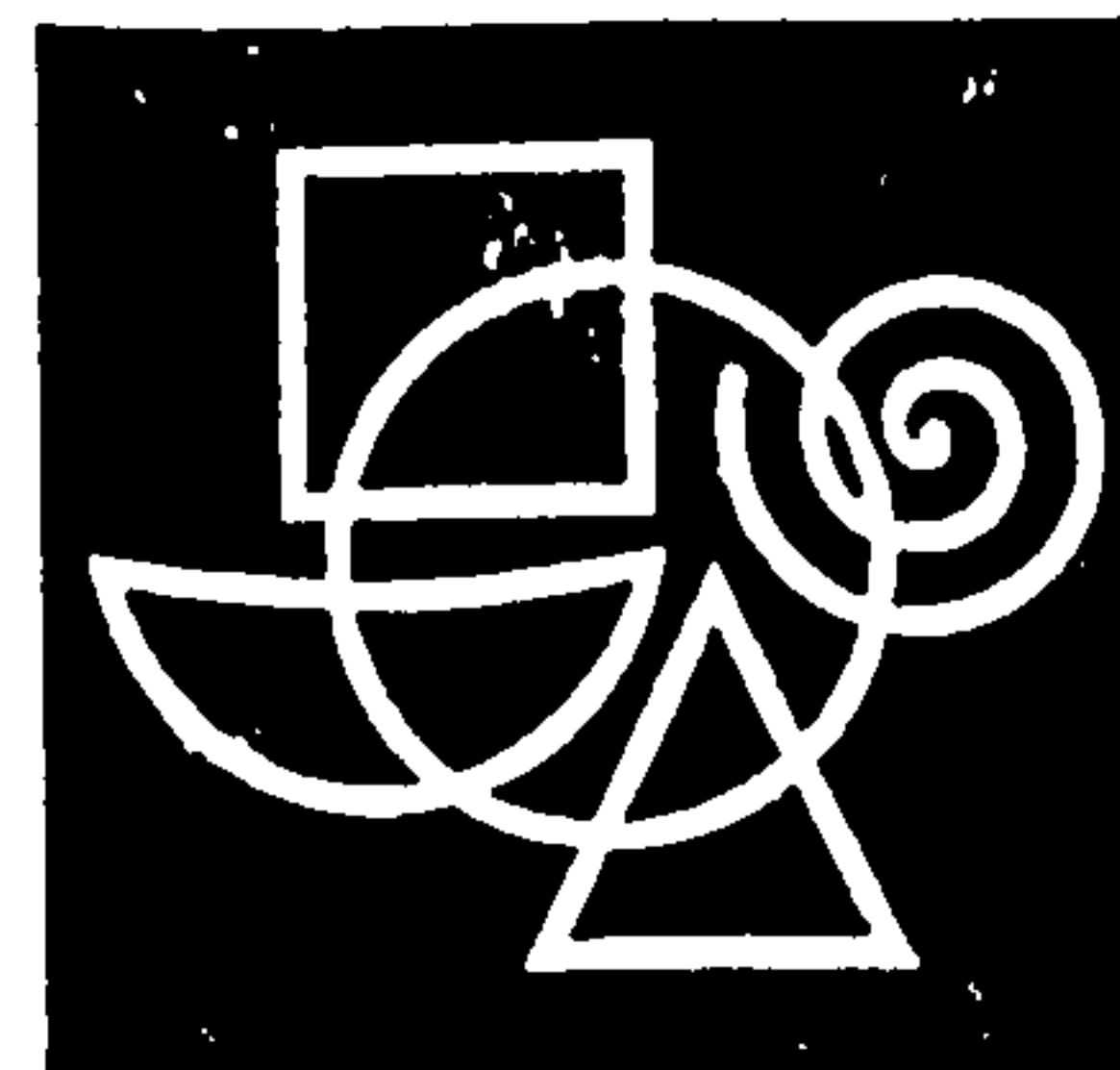
or you can e-mail me on **spettle@tenprioryave.demon.co.uk**

Appendix 4. Letters relating to Ethics Approval

Salomons Centre
David Salomons Estate
Broomhill Road, Southborough
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Kent TN3 0TG

Telephone: 01892 515152
Facsimile: 01892 539102

Our Ref: AL/cs/075
Direct Tel: 01892 507665
Direct Fax: 01892 507660
E-mail: t.lavender@salomons.org.uk



**SALOMONS
CENTRE**

Ms S Pettle
10 Priory Avenue
Crouch End
London
N8 7RN

31 July 1998

Dear Sharon,

Re: Ethics Approval – “Secrets about biological parentage: experiences of concealment and revelation: a qualitative study”

Thank you for sending the above proposal for Ethics Approval. The Panel has considered your application and Conditional Approval is given. For Full Approval we would want you to take the following relatively minor points into account.

1. The Panel wishes to see a copy of the advertisement you intend to place.
2. The Panel would like you to state what will happen to the transcripts as well as the tapes.

It is hoped that these conditions will be relatively easy to meet and, providing these are met, the Panel foresees no problems granting full approval. It is important to say that the Panel was very impressed with the way in which ethical issues had been considered, given the sensitive nature of the study. There were a number of typographical errors in the appendices and a copy of your submission indicating these errors is enclosed.

We look forward to seeing the results and hope you enjoy the research.

Yours sincerely,

Professor A Lavender
Chair
Ethics Panel

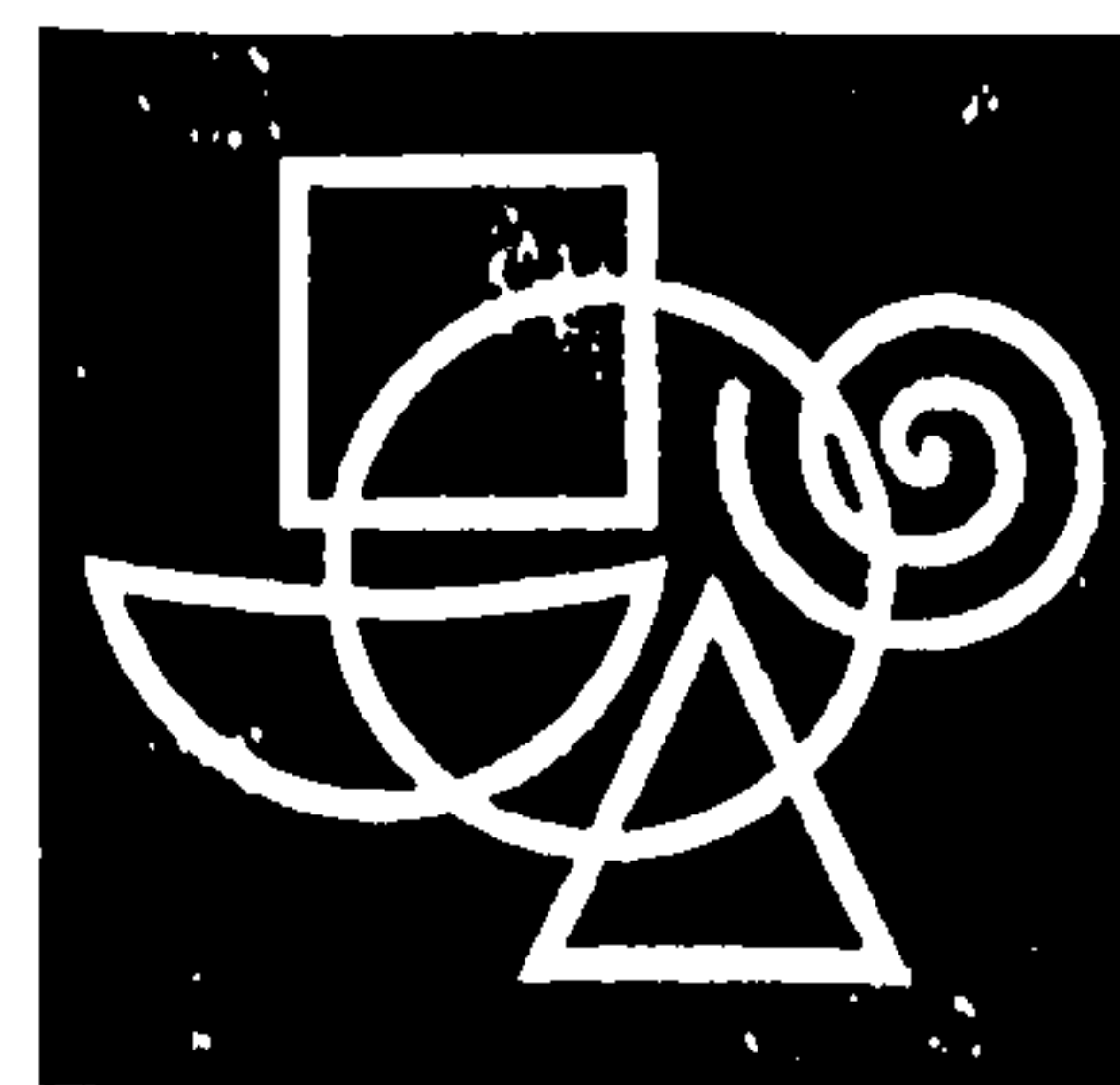
Enc: Submission

c.c. Caroline Hogg
Viv Martin

Salomons Centre
David Salomons Estate
Broomhill Road, Southborough
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Kent TN3 0TG

Telephone: 01892 515152
Facsimile: 01892 539102

Our Ref: LT/
Direct Tel: 01892 507668
Direct Fax: 01892 507660
E-mail: lthompson@salomons.org.uk



**SALOMONS
CENTRE**

Ms S Pettle
10 Priory Avenue
Crouch End
London
N8 7RN

24th August 1998

Dear Sharon,

Re: Ethics Approval – “Secrets about biological parentage: experiences of concealment and revelation: a qualitative study”

Thank you for your recent letters. The Panel note that you have given very good and careful consideration of all the points raised in our letter dated 31st July 1998 and is pleased to provide full ethical approval for your research project.

We look forward to seeing the results and hope you enjoy the research.

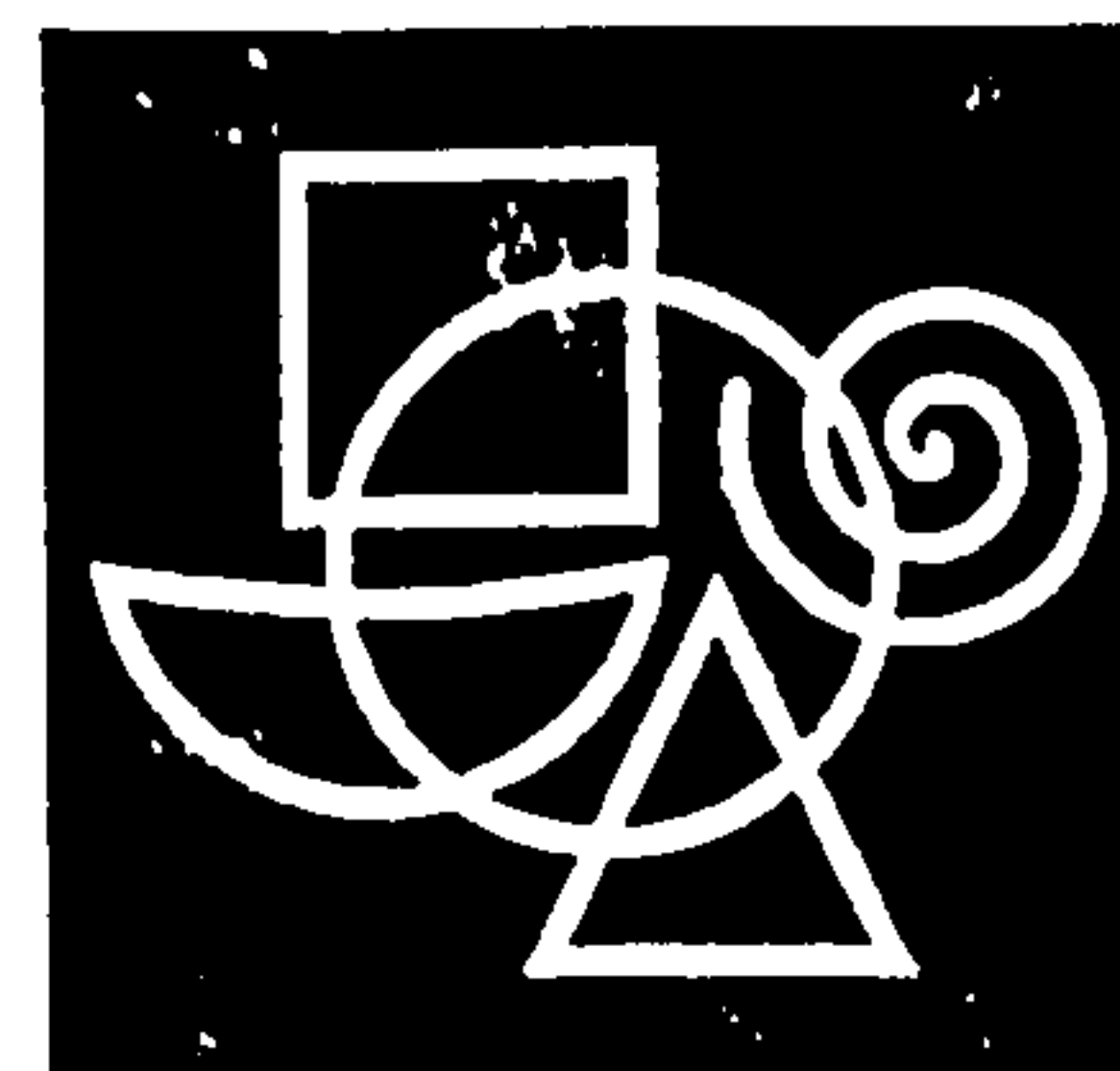
Yours sincerely,

Professor A Lavender
Chair
Ethics Panel

Salomons Centre
David Salomons Estate
Broomhill Road, Southborough
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Kent TN3 0TG

Telephone: 01892 515152
Facsimile: 01892 539102

Our Ref: LT/
Direct Tel: 01892 507668
Direct Fax: 01892 507660
E-mail: l.thompson@salomons.org.uk



SALOMONS
CENTRE

Ms S Pettle
10 Priory Avenue
Crouch End
London
N8 7RN

26th November 1998

Dear Sharon,

Re: Ethics Approval – “Secrets about biological parentage: experiences of concealment and revelation: a qualitative study”

Thank you for your letter of 11th November 1998. The proposed changes to the Research Information Sheet and Consent Form seem entirely acceptable and address the issues that arise from the procedural changes to the study. Thus Full Ethical Approval for the changes is given.

We are obviously very interested in the study and look forward to learning the results.

Yours sincerely,

Professor A Lavender
Chair
Ethics Panel

Appendix 5. Consent Form for Participants

Title of Research Study:

Secrets about biological parentage: experiences of concealment and revelation: A qualitative study.

Investigator:

***Ms. Sharon Pettle
BSc (Hons), MSc in Clinical Psychology,
UKCP Registered Systemic Therapist.***

I (name).....

have had the nature and purpose of the above study explained to me, and any questions concerning its aims and methods have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate.

In addition to a general explanation, the following have been emphasised:

- a) that the information shared in the interview will be treated in strict confidence.
- b) that if I am uncomfortable with any questions asked in either interview, I may decline to answer them without any explanation being required.
- c) that the interviews will be recorded using an audiocassette machine for later transcription. All transcripts on disc or printed will have the names and identifying details changed. Tapes, discs and transcripts will be kept safely. At the end of the study (no later than October 1999) I will be asked whether I want the audiotapes destroyed or sent to me.
- d) that in the second interview, Sharon Pettie, the Investigator, will provide a summary of the first interview. This preliminary analysis will reflect the Investigators thoughts and perceptions of important themes and categories that emerged in the earlier interview. I understand that I will be invited to comment on these.
- e) I understand that I am under no obligation to remain in the study, and may withdraw at any stage. If I chose to do this, I may do so without giving a reason.
- f) that my anonymity will be preserved and that any identifying details will be changed. I am aware that when the study is written up or verbally presented direct quotations from the interview will be used.

Signed

Date / / .

Appendix 6. Participant Information Sheet

Name Age

Address
.....
.....
.....

Telephone number

Occupation

Family Composition

So that I have an idea of your family before we meet, I would be grateful if you could list the members of your family, their relationship to you i.e. partner, children (if any), siblings and parents (biological and otherwise). Use initials or first names only if you prefer, and mark with an * those you live with.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Relationship to you.</u>
-------------	------------	-----------------------------

Briefly describe the 'secret' about your origins.

How old were you when you found this out?

Would you prefer the interviews to take place in your home or at the address below?

Would you prefer that I contact you by letter or telephone?

Please return this form in the stamped addressed envelope provided
Thankyou.

Appendix 7. Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Stage one : Initial interview

“As you know I am interested in your experience of being told new information about your biological parentage that was kept a secret.

(I will say ‘mother’ or ‘father’ if I know which it is).

One way to start is to think of someone, such as a friend that you have told the story to, and try to summarise for me what you told them. If you have not already told the story to anyone like this, perhaps you could imagine that you are telling someone now.

When you have finished I will then ask to questions to help me understand more of your experience. Please remember that to tell me if you feel that you would prefer not to answer any question”.

Revelation

Tell me about what you were told, and the circumstances in which the information came out (**prompt for facts - who, when, where, how**)

Why do you think s/he/they told you, and what do you think their reasons were. Why then?

What was said within your family on this issue, what was the response to further questions, what about with people outside the family?

How do you think people in the family talked about the secret and its contents? How has this changed over time?

What kind of image comes to mind when you think about the event. or which captures what you have been through/reflects the experience for you

What effects do you think the revelation had on you at first (**prompt for feelings and thoughts e.g. what kinds of feelings did you have? immediate & short term, longer term**)

How would you describe the effects on the rest of the family (**prompt regarding different members**)

How do you think other members of your family think of the revelation and its' effects. (**prompt for different members perspectives**)

What about how you were and are viewed by other people? what effect did the revelation have on that?

Who did you talk to/confide in about it? What did you tell them? Why did you think it was important to tell them? What was their reaction?

Concealment of information

What is your understanding of why you were not told before? or
How have you explained to yourself the decision not to tell you.
(prompt for perspectives from each parent, wider family,
cultural and society influences) Who or what do you think
motivated this? What was your response to this? Has it
changed over time.

If other people knew, how do you understand their not telling you
either.

How do you think the issue should have been dealt with/might have
been handled better- what ideas did you have then, what would
you say now

Looking back what effects do you think the concealment had on
relationships in the household/family/extended family/outside the
family (as appropriate depending on circumstances. (prompt for
between parents, between 'siblings', parents and participant)

Do you remember having doubts about your parentage, or asking
questions about it? What response did you get to expressions of
doubts or direct questions? What have been your reactions to
those experiences?

Integration/adjustment.

What did you do with the new information
who did you tell, how did you handle any declared wish for
continued concealment, how did you come to those decisions

How do you see the effect of the information on you - your sense of
self/identity, relationships within your family of origin and
with peers/partner/children/current family/friends.

What effects do you think the experience has had on your own ideas
about parenting

What ideas did you have about the donor/exploring the relationship with
your biological parent, what did you decide to do, how did you
come to that decision

How do you perceive the effect that the revelation has had on
relationships within the family over time, (positive and negative)

Was (is) there a difference between how you have described your
reaction to me, and what you communicated to your parents? If
so how to you understand that?

What (or who) helped you in the process of trying to make sense of
this experience

Any issues left unresolved, if so, what, how have you thought of
tackling them.

and lastly.....Are there any other aspects of the experience you think it
is important to mention

Stage two : On return

With participants agreement I will return 4-8 weeks later with a summary of the analysis of the previous interview, and ask for their responses to reading it.

Validity of the analysis

Do you think it is a fair representation of how you presented the story.
Are there any aspects of it that you disagree with.

Reflections on the interview process

What have been the effects of taking part in this interview? how was it different than you expected?

Are there any questions that you would have specifically liked to be asked. **(remember to ask them)**

Are there ways in which (or people with whom) you describe your experiences very differently from the way in which you have spoken today

Something learned

Imagine that there was a family in a similar situation: what ideas would you give to parents, to the person just told.

Looking back at your experience, what ideas do you have about how information like that/similar circumstances could be handled differently

Future changes

If you could change something about your family now, what would it be
What would need to be different to change/improve relationships (further)

If this research was to be extended, which other members of your family do you think might be willing to talk about the experience from their own perspective

Appendix 8. List of Participants

Name	Gender	Secret	Age at revelation	Years elapsed	Age at Interview
Martine	F	Adoption	37	13	50
Edith	F	Adoption	42	15	57
Melanie	F	Adoption	49	7	56
Chrissi	F	Adoption	54	1	55
Ella	F	Adoption	15/16	22	38
David	M	Donor Insemination	27	21	48
Fiona	F	Donor Insemination	16	3	19
Petula	F	Donor Insemination	19	7	26
Juliette	F	Stepfather	31	8	39
Jill	F	Stepfather	14	24	38
Rosa	F	Stepfather	23	28	51
Dierdre	F	Stepfather	25	25	50

Appendix 9.

Responses from participants about the analysis of their interview

The following comments were made by participants in the second meeting when the analysis was presented to them and their views sought.

Melanie

*I think you're right in the things you've said there.
I don't think there is anything I would disagree with there*

Ella

I was a bit nervous, suppose [you] came back with things I didn't want to hear, but there's nothing... nothing that's a great surprise, nothing that I disagree with.

Jill

Do I have a sense of them fitting – yes I do. I'm not so sure about the Identity one. I think they fit. But I've got some discomfort with the gender theme, especially the idea that I have a view of men as negative, and issues to do with need for achievement. I see women generally more self aware and astute than men – men develop different skills, they may have similar emotional needs and desires but different ways of expressing them.

The emotional sequelae were complicated. A strange combination of being terribly hurt and upset and I was quite distressed and also quite relieved.

I am struck by 'Making sense of it', and I've always had a strong need to do this – that explains X and Y. To understand. I haven't actually looked at it that way, but it is something I've always done.

Edith

I couldn't have wrote it down like that.... But yes,

I think you've made it a fair comment on it. It is such a mess to make anything of. There are so many directions, isn't there.

David wrote

Many thanks for the information. I think this is accurate and good.

Dierdre

You've done a good job! Looking at them just like this, I am pretty sure that one way or another, through any of these, the things most important to me will come out.

I don't think you missed out anything, the only thing is that sometimes, it's the paradoxes that are inside them.

That is all absolutely right

Petula wrote

I really do agree with the major themes. It confirms how much this has affected me.

Fiona

Yes, this all makes sense to me

Chrissi

They all sound quite right to me.

Juliette

They are all completely accurate. And they are themes that I can relate to immediately. The 'web of intrigue' is even - for me, even more interesting. It's something I've never thought before. I've thought about the other areas. Maybe.... Maybe... with the web of intrigue, maybe what's useful is um... I remember feeling the moment I found out – all those arguments my parents had – they were my fault, because they should never have got married in the first place. So that's an incredible feeling, and maybe that's why I'm trying to be understanding to them because of the situation which resulted in me.

It feels a very clever synopsis of what I really feel, and the key issues. It feels right, completely right.

Rosa wrote

Sharon, you seemed to have done a good job in portraying the story as I told it to you. Yes, I think it was fair and accurate. On some level, I feel a bit defensive, although you never stated nor hinted any disapproval. But having told the story aloud to someone I was not trying to amuse with my story was strange for me. Almost as though I was being put on trial for some past action. This has nothing whatsoever to do with you specifically.....just my reaction to hearing my own words. Rarely has anyone commented on the situation other than to say "Rosa, you certainly have some interesting stories." Certainly no one has given me an interpretation before this.

Of one particular theme she wrote

This interpretation is quite revealing and accurate. I had never put it into words but you seem to have 'diagnosed' the situation most realistically. It seems strange, though, that the family is so tolerant of differences but not of divorce. Of course, that was nearly 30 years ago when divorce was an accepted evil in our society.

Martine

It is very interesting that you pull out these ideas. They are certainly key issues in the experience.

Appendix 10. Inter rater reliability: Cohen's Kappa

Crosstabs

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
VAR00001						
* VAR00002	125	100.0%	0	.0%	125	100.0%

VAR00001 * VAR00002 Crosstabulation

Count

		VAR00002						Total
		1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	6.00	
VAR00001	1.00	24	1		1		1	27
	2.00		17	3	2		3	25
	3.00	1		7	1			9
	4.00		1	1	22			24
	5.00				1	18	8	27
	6.00		1		1		11	13
Total		25	20	11	28	18	23	125

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.748	.043	18.428	.000
N of Valid Cases		125			

- a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
- b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Appendix 11. Extract of transcript with original annotations – 'Martine'

The transcription of the interview with 'Martine' ran to a total of twenty-six pages. This thirteen page extract has original annotations which show the development of the analytical coding process.

* MG Transcription becomes 'martine text'
* Interview: August 1998
* Final version 20/10/98

I So, have you got an idea about where you'd like to start?

circumstances
that led to
discovery

P Ah, yes.... I think with the factual discovery,er..... which was certainly accidental, I was 37 and needed a new passport, and the French authorities has changed the rules so you needed to have a full birth certificate rather than an extract of the birth certificate. So I had to apply to my...er... to the Town Hall where I was born and they sent me a full birth certificate, and that had somebody else's name on it, well.. another name. And I thought "Oh bother, I needed my passport quickly" so I'll.....er..... they made a mistake, and then I read on and realised that that was my birth name and that I had been adopted and I had **absolutely no conscious awareness of it. Absolutely none!** ...er... so, I stood there with this piece of paper...er...reading the name of this stranger that was neither my...my...my first name nor my surname, so,er..... I was quite shocked.

No suspicion

unaware

Impact

trying to act normally
but shock.

I.....put it aside to think about because I needed to go to work, uh, so I went to work and then...I couldn't concentrate - I was in, I was in a state of shock. Really. And I shared an office with someone else, and eventually I told her about it and it was quite helpful because she had two adopted children of her own so she was able to just at least understand the trauma...er... as I say that was, we made better friends that day than we had before, it was quite...er... Then I came home, ...er..., I was working part-time so I came home early afternoon...er..., and I can't remember exactly...how I shared the information with my partner at the time - who was a little worried about what my reaction might be, but I was okay, I was fine, you know, a little non-plussed but not distressed.

Impact

Impact

Impact
seemed to
be missing

Emotional
Impact
very intense

Until I, later on I wanted to have a bath and I came to the bathroom and there was no way I could take my clothes off - there was a very large mirror and there was no way I could take my clothes off in front of the mirror. I was suddenly completely panicked, I could not, I realised the reason why I could not look at myself in the mirror. And that lasted for several days and was the most important effect of it at the time, for three or four days.

Emotional
Revelation
↓
effect on
activity

I How did you explain that particular experience to yourself- that "I can't look at myself in the mirror?"

Identity

P It was an ...er...identity thing, I just, I mean the...the...the... question, I mean it came as a joke, it was, you know "who's little girl are you?" (laughs) and I, yes it was like the familiarity of ones image in the mirror... I just could not face that for...for quite a while. It....It was almost as if my image in the mirror lied to me too, ...er..., obviously

Identity
questions

Who am I? How come I didn't know.

Identity

emotional

Impact linked

to identity

Intense emotional

reaction starting

when

Immediate but

temp. effect on situation

Search - begins

in self

Identity

having to

re-think self

Questions followed

genetic

fact/loss

/grief

re-thinking

1/pc, in 1/pc

to self.

disconnection

from stories

that had been

owned.

lack of belonging

there is a lot of things around truth and lies around all this ...er..., but it was, yes, I....., and I was frightened because I was looking at this stranger. So it was two things, one, it was a stranger and ...er...not only that it was a ...er...lying stranger. ...er... [].. I think that's mostly it, it, ...er..., yes I had to go for three days without a bath because I just could not ...[]...yes I could not take my clothes of either, it was very, very acute. I was alright ...er...to go bed, ...er... but not to ... but then after that, when I could actually look at myself in the mirror, I mean I brushed my teeth closing my eyes, it was that acute.

Identity

emotional

After a few days when I started to be able to look at myself...er..., then I really started to look very searchingly, ...er..., I really needed then to look at myself the way I had never looked at myself - you know, not from a "is everything in place" point of view or "have I got a spot on my nose?" it was just really a searching look because I had absolutely no idea ..[]..er.. how I was feeling about myself anymore, ...er... [].... It's a very big blank...[]... I am thinking "I am a complete questionmark to myself, I am a complete enigma", you know. I thought I knew you/me but I don't.

Identity

Search

in self

Then of course all the considerations came in like you know, things like gene bank, thinking "how do I know whether I have inherited anything, whether I have passed on anything to my children" and, but, that was all the sensible stuff still. Later, there was a lot more grief around all that, ..because...and that has never stopped, ...and thirteen years later I'm still dealing with this because it's still, occasionally its all the family stories of people before me, ...er... specially my adopted father had two brothers who died before I was born but their stories of heroism and all that were certainly not my stories. I was not connected with these people and ...[]... and that, that is quite painful because all the, all the lore of your childhood suddenly becomes irrelevant, you know. You don't belong in that tribe, you don't belong to that group and that is very ...isolating....[]...

Questions

about

heritage

emotional

-long term

Re-thinking

connections

How long do you think it was before those feelings - you said they're till going - but before they started, before they sort of kicked in, in a way. Because you are saying there was shock, there were practical things...

P Yes.yes

Iand then the sort of more of the emotional working through, working with ...

P Quite a long time. Quite a long time, I think it was ...er... probably, I'm looking at the timing of this and thinking that it was in 86 and then uh, we were coming back...er...back to G----- (town in Southern England), so moving house and all that, I was very busy, emotionally, my emotions were needed in other areas for quite a while.

Pacing,

other priorities

other issues

more prominent

? link to having to

re-relate to self before

looking further ahead

Research Interview mg

What was lost
disconnection
from stories
ebb & flows

...er..., but as I got, yes, in fact as I got back to G----- (town in Southern England), I realised how much I missed, I missed all that.... []...all that folklore, all that, ...er.... It was gradual actually, it was very gradual, ...er... [].. and.... []...then ...then, it got reawakened I mean then sort of was shelved and Then it was very much reawakened as both my adoptive parents ...er... became ill and needed to be, to move out of their house and I needed to attend a great deal... to their welfare.

Retaining
r/ps.

Boys

non-commun beyond confirmation
emotion

Now, the thing is, I did not talk to them about my adoption, but there was a lot of anger, in fact, and ...er..., around that because my father was still compos mentis, just but I mean, yes... he had his... whereas my mother was already quite deep in Alzheimers so there was no way I could talk to her about it. But my father being a man of very little emotional display. I talked to him, in fact immediately after the revelation, like, within a couple of days after the opening of the letter, I spoke to him on the phone and I said to him "you know I have just discovered that I was adopted and, you know, can you tell me more about it." And he said, "well, there's nothing much to say, we loved you as our child and that is all there is to be said." And I could see he was not going to be drawn any further and then I rung an aunt who

Ltd comm.

brief seen.

Comm & fa.

I So was this one of your mother's sisters?

c Aunt.

P
demand to keep
knowledge
unsaid

threat and
insistence.

No she was married to my father's brother so she was again, once removed...., and she said "yes, you were adopted" and she said, "**your mother was so fierce about it all because she swore utterly everybody to secrecy**". "No," she said "I believe she's burnt all your papers so you won't find anything out". She's quite dramatic, my aunt, was always dramatic. "And", she said, "**she's burnt all your papers, and we were sworn on the pain of death to never ever let on that you were adopted, and you were a lovely baby and ...**", she went on to describe how sweet and gorgeous I was and then I said "any idea how I was adopted?" And she said "well yes, somebody connected with some... who worked in some big store in Paris", and I thought 'how bizarre', you know (laughs), **was I handed over the counter?**

Intensity of
secret
" (Mo)

the meaning of
information
self as commodity

Baby as
commodity

Intensity of mo's
need.

But I realised later it was an organisation that had volunteers, and dealt with, I don't know, uh, I don't know how, but it was definitely an organisation that placed babies. And she said "that's all I know about it, and you were about six months at the time, and that's about all I can tell you" - because she wasn't living in the same town at the time. But **she said that the, what really struck me was how very, very fierce my mother had been about getting everybody to swear to absolute secrecy.**

Intensity
of secret.

I So who else knew? You mentioned your mother, your father, your aunt

P And obviously her husband who by then had died - my uncle.

people
holding it

I Did they have children?

P No, no, it's a very non-fertile ground that family as well, because my father had three brothers, none of whom had children, and my mother had one brother who, again, did not have a child either so that was the, so none of their people had children

I So you were the only child of that generation

unable to step
pro. knowing
(Carhart & D1)

P An only child for that, yes and they were all very old as well, and my adoptive parents were 47 when they adopted me, so yes, that meant that they would be in their sixties when I was a teenager, that didn't make life easy. It's difficult to be a sixties teenager with parents who were teenagers during the First World War. So, that's, **obviously all the neighbours knew because, I mean, you know, my mother appeared with a child not having gone through a pregnancy obviously** (laughs)

people
had a
secret.

I And did your family grew up, you grew up in that same house throughout your childhood.

P No, no we moved when I was about three...er... around four, we moved to a bigger house. In fact we were living in a flat and we moved to a house, and ...er... and **somebody else who knew about it were... the people my mother worked with,** because ...uh... there is a reference to my mother – her boss. She was quite a remarkable woman, she was the first woman bank manager in France, which was quite... and she remained for the next ten years, there wasn't another one for ten years after that so that was in the early sixties, no mid-fifties...so she was quite an odd ball. And it was interesting because **she had gone through internal exams to become that and it was then that she adopted me after she had passed her...all her career... passed a particular point in her career. And she then felt ready – in my less charitable moments I felt "yes, she got to that point, then she could buy a baby".**

"

Baby as
commodity

meaning of it
self as commodity

I Did it involve a lot of money changing hands?

P No

I Do you know that?

Underpins
commodity
ownership but
not care

P No no, not at all, no but it did involve a certain lifestyle because, for my first two years, although they had adopted me, and it would be unthinkable these days, **they actually had me live at a nanny's house, and I only came to their house at the weekends**

"

P So talk of isolation (laughs)

I So is that something that you already knew

P Yes

I So you knew that

Nanny was main attachment figure

P Yes, I knew that, oh yes, because I have memories of this woman. I mean I have memories of just the way she kissed me and **we remained very close**, in fact we always, we used to go and visit her and three or four times a year, all through my childhood, she was a very lovely woman, and I knew her well until my late teenagehood when I moved to England. She probably died after that, ...but she was by then in about her late seventies. **So I was very fond of her.** Attachment figure

Commodity

where baby ranked in hierarchy of demands

It's, it's very difficult to...uh..., to imagine doing that... to a child nowadays. I mean no adoption agency would let the child go to a household that is not even going to have this baby around, you know. **Obviously my mother was working very hard for promotion and everything, and just could not, could not have me around.** Baby as commodity

I Your father was working too?

P Yes, my father had a small business and was working very hard too, and then they moved to a bigger house which is I think... when I had, from then on I had a daily nanny taking care of me every day. And yeah, well...yes...until my mother retired, and she had to take early retirement following a car crash. So she retired in her, at 55, some thing like that, so that's when she retired and then she was at home, very bored, well, when you've run a bank you know (laughs), and a big bank - it was a big town you know, L----- (a port), the bank is quite important to a lot of ...er...foreign business and shipping, all that, so this was not a little county town as I was saying it was a much bigger affair.

So that's sort of circumstantial stuff, ...er... []...

I Is there something particular about the French system that allowed it to be secret for so long?

not searching for more info

loyalty protective

right time for her personal pacing variety of feelings energy from others

P Yes, yes, and in fact there is a whole other development which is after my discovery. **I let it be for years, I** dealt with the death of my parents, because they died respectively in 1989 and 1992 and **so the discovery was in '86** and I didn't feel, because I was told by my aunt how crucial it was to my mother not...for no-one to know, and especially me, obviously, well, **especially me not to know. I felt it would be disloyal to start searches before they were both dead, for some reason** - well, before she was dead anyway. ...er..., I felt quite strongly about that, so, and in any case **I didn't feel I was ready** and a lot of people said that "are you not desperate to know?" and I said, "**well, no not really, I'm very mixed about it**". Pacing! stages. protective

I once, **at the insistence of my then partner**, went to Paris to have a look at the clinic, or the address that they had on the birth certificate Pacing

I Which said where you were born?

P Yes, which gave the address

I And it gave you the name of your birth mother?

P No

I No birth names, no.

it needs
courage to take it
forward.
pacing

Once decided
wish to know -
blocked by
legalities

used as caring
and cover up -
motivations for
use.

Pacing self in
the story

identity -
ideal about
real story

No names at all, and, so I went there **but I didn't even have the guts to go in** and it had, it was a clinic, so, you know, it was just as anonymous as anything else really. ...er..., and it was , and in fact **it was only last year that I have started making the searches, so, you know, that's a long time has elapsed.** ...er..., but **the French system, which is what I am hitting now,** ...er..., is that, uh in the EC, only France and Luxembourg have a system that they call 'sous-x, which is "under x", which is a system whereby a mother can withhold her name - and the father, I mean, the parents can go through a special registration of the baby, and withhold the name of the child.

I had a very interesting conversation with the woman at the ...er... Birth, Marriages and Deaths Registrar in my ..., where I was born and I said, you know, what was the purpose. And she said, you know, funnily enough, she said it was great....it had several reasons, but, well one of them being because in France you cannot disinherit your children, it is a Catholic country and you know, the family is a very big thing. You know, even if you will against it, it will be overruled. It would ...er..., it would affect..., it would mean that ...uh.... bastard children of ...rich families could never have a claim, it really made absolutely sure of that...., so you see it **had a economic reason** - I think it's probably the reason why it was first introduced. But, it was apparently used a great deal...er... in the forties, well, even the thirties - late thirties and the forties, and she said, surprisingly, into the early fifties, **by Jewish families**, who, knowing very well that the writing was on the wall in the thirties, and ...later.... that, that they did not know whether they were going to survive, would hand over babies to be adopted by bona fide French families so that their babies would not be taken, and apparently it went on into the fifties to show that they were not trusting, you know, the peace.

And, that, I found that heart-breaking to hear that, specially a culture that is so attached to babies and to, you know, family, you know, could hand over a child and never to see it again, and never to have it claim its origins. (big sigh) **I find that just unbelievably sad..... I discovered that last year. So there is a whole area there of history which I had no idea of. So I thought maybe that is that, because I have a very very close connection with the Jewish culture, but, that isn't actually the reason I found out.**

pacing

pacing

real story

So what was the question? (laughs)

I I was interested in how

P So this under-x thing is absolutely so, so she, this woman had said to me, uh, "the point about it is that even us, we do not have a record, there just is not a record of the name of your parents." So that she said during the war it was quite a good thing ...er... because even the **children of Resistance** as well, you know, some women have handed their children like that, which means the Gestapo could not arrest and torture the people from the, you know, to try and get their babies for hostages, you know, there was no way, they were totally removed from identification.

I So that the piece of paper you got, I'm just trying to work out how you got to it. You wrote saying, "I'd like my full birth certificate"

P "Full birth certificate", so I can, I can show it to you if you like, so that you can have a...

I So the birth certificate that you had was what?

keeping her
unaware

short form does not
give fact of
adoption away

P **Before that, my mother always got it for me, bless her, she would**
wouldn't she? Ah, you know like for going to university and things like
that, and ...er... er... **it was always an extract**, and the extract gave my
name, the name of the guy who'd taken down the, uh, the name of the
registrar, uh and the time and date of my birth - of the place, and
parents name, my adoptive parent's name, and that was it.

Cover up

I Right

P And of course, once the adoption was made official, that is the entry
that would be put in, ...er.....

I So when you asked for your full certificate, you didn't get a certificate of
adoption, you got the original

P I got the original birth certificate

I A name of somebody you'd never heard of

owning /
disowning self.
complexity about
names - which
link to birth parents

P A completely different name, **so that it for me, you know, it was a wrong**
birth certificate, it was somebody else's, because ...er..., the first and
second names - I have actually, the two first names are now my
second and third name, so I have been..., I have kept them

experience
of birth cert.

Right, you weren't, were you given them by your adoptive parents, or
were you

P Do you mind if I give the names

I No not at all

P Right, I was born Marie Paul, ...uh and then Philipine as a ... surname, and my adoptive parents put the name Michelline before, so I am now Michelline Marie Paul and then of course they added their own name. So its, **so at least they kept my two original names but they shoved them along and introduced another name.** And it is very interesting because my mother's, my adoptive mother's maiden name was Michel, her surname was Michel and my name is Michelline – that they gave me, so its obviously, you know, as a...er... reference to her maiden name. And the surname that I was given as a new-born, which was Philipine, I discovered later, was in fact a surname made up out of my father's first name, which was Philipe].

kept names but not

birth cert

not identifying pointers to origins but clues insufficient

So its like all those names are lined up and are all reference to different people, but they are all references to first names, not one of them are surnames.

birth cert

I Right, so that the name that was on your birth certificate was, the last name, was a made-up name.

P Yes, by my birth-mother

I By your birth-mother, or birth-father, or both

P Yes, ...or both

I So, its your adoptive father whose name is Philipe?

P No, no no, my birth father

I Right, so you've actually managed to find out that

P Yes, I I.....[], yes last year I got hold ofthe adoption agency, I went specifically to make some enquiries and all that, and I got hold of the adoption agency, and afterward, and they actually handed me, a few weeks later, they handed me my file, because they are kept away from their premises, **so there is still a huge amount of security awareness around all these things.** I find that quite fascinating. And, uh, they did it very professionally because it was done the, at the office of the psychiatrist, a woman of ...er..., yes who, a professional who handed me the file and said you can photocopy whatever you like from it and, and **it was very, very interesting – it was quite complete, it had.....except, you know, surnames.**

like no. system referred in mo's beh

information but not inform

Real story

birth cert.

I Right, in line with this sous-x?

lack of identity given

Impact emo.
to facts/details/
content

Impact of next
discovery

Challenged story
that had developed
she

Social context

Challenged the
story she had
developed.

Heaven important
but sense that
this is the most
positive thing
that can be
drawn from info
relates to earlier

Commodity
lack of
care

P

Sous-x its called in French, so it's under-x, uh because **it means you are declared under, as an "x", which is an extraordinary... I mean emotionally it's quite hard.** ...er..., so I...., I guess I was handed this thing, and my actual little dossier of my adoption gives my first name of my mother, which was Marta, the first name of my father, and then it gives me lots of information about their siblings, about their existing children, uh I mean the existence of these people and a lot of information about health, which was really helpful. Uh, but ...er..., and their profession, and where they born, and when, and their date of birth. And all that is quite complete but, without a surname, you know... (Big intake of breath) **The great shock was to discover that my parents were a lot older than I expected.**

Real story

Impact

In fact my birth father was as old as my adoptive father, and that my birth mother was forty when I was born. So, they.....it's not because it was a teenage pregnancy or anything like that, it's just they were both married to other people, and ...er..., so it was obviously an affair, and she was divorcing, and she had already two children and she could not possibly keep me, a child from.... not from the marriage, because he, her husband, would have probably refused then to give her any financial support, and **the culture of the time** would have supported him entirely. So for the sake of her other two kids she could not have this third one, and it was very clear, ...er..., so [

..yeah, **it was an extraordinary experience for me to read that stuff**

Impact of
real story

But **at least they were both healthy**, they were both, you know, no sort of history of anything in the family - well, the grandparents had also information, health information about the grandparents who both, I mean on both sides, had sort of died in their late eighties, or whatever. So, you know, **it felt like very healthy stock - that's quite comforting and reassuring.**

Relief in
real story

Did it give you any information about the first six months?

P

No, nothing at all

I

So you don't know where you were?

P

In **some baby farm somewhere, because I was handed for adoption on the day of my birth** and there, there is a thing from the police, a sort of certificate, saying that, ...er..., and ...er..., and probably taken there the next day sort of thing, you know, and, goodness knows where I wasuntil December, and I was born on the 29th of June, and my adoptive parents picked me up in early December. And then officially adopted me in January, which is why I was Christened, for instance, very late for a baby, and christened practically when I was a year old, which is quite late for in France, uh because, ...er... you know, obviously they didn't have me to hand to christen before (laughs).

Commodity
- not a
personal
feeling

Diff discussion
w father. P
Not suitable
topic - no
thought about
her

I I'm wanting to pick up on various things that you said, and I'm thinking about when you told your father you knew - your adoptive father, that you knew - ...er..., what was it that made you feel that there weren't going to be further conversations about it with him, or were there, and you pushed him further? What sort of conversations did you have with him after that first one?

...er..., I never raised the matter again, really, with him. [] ...
No, ...because he made it very clear that that's all there was to say, and therefore, he didn't see that there was any point in... you know, there were things to do with emotions, or talking about that, is not ...er..., [] ...is not a sort of thing that he would have uh, that he would have wanted to do, you know

Canmu" i
Fa

I Did he say anything about you, what it might be like for you finding out?

answering P
different time

emotions that
followed

Questioned purpose
of adoption exp.
in r/p to how treated as a child.

No, no. No I think he just said "ah you know do you". "yes" I said, and that's when he said this rather defensive sort of line, you know "well we loved you just as much as if you had been our own child" and that was it. I mean I had a huge amount of resentment, (laughs) about all sorts of things, ...er... [] ... I mean, you know, I mean the huge

question really was "why", you know, "why", but that one I never got to ask

Why?

Emotions -
long term
unanswered
questions

trying to P
understand why
adoption happened

father's inability
to allow ch. att'n.

Well, you know, why did they adopt me ...because the family dynamic, my parents had been married, uh.. they celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary the year before they adopted me, so they had been absolutely each other's everything for years and years and years, and they were ...er... very, very co-dependent (laughs) to put it bluntly. And of course, and my father was rabidly jealous of me, I mean really jealous, uh and it went right into my teens, in fact into my adult life, my mother could not give me any attention whatsoever, without him making, ...behaving like a very, very hurt and jealous kid.

R/p i fa.
experiences

I mean, temper tantrums, ... door slamming, ... sulking, I mean the whole lot, and that was a man who was in his fifties and sixties at the time. ...er... He also had a very, I found very difficult habit, this habit which used to make me feel very uncomfortable of calling each other "maman" and "papa", which I found very disturbing even as a child I knew it wasn't the norm.

poor r/p i
father

Many memories
of father's
-ve been directed
at her.

So its, its very strange that, why did he agree to adopt when, you know, when he then came up with all this barrage of ...er..., of hostility, because it was very hostile, he used to be very hostile to me - at family meals he used to always attack me, or if I shared anything that I had done at school that I was interested in it would be quite verbally violently put down.

powerful mo.

And so that, I can't work out, you know, uh my only guess it that it was really my mother that since she really ruled the roost I think she was absolutely top boss, you know, she wanted a child and he had just gone along when he really didn't... or... he had no idea of what the reality of a child would be, compared to the idea. Yeah.

Mo's power

unsolved puzzle

So I, I think ...er..., [] that was ...er... () what was foremost in her mind was a) this love bit 'we loved you as much as if...', well no I think if you had a child imposed on you through natural birth, I can understand, but going out of your way to get one, bring one in (laughs) to be that unpleasant is really strange, but I never had the opportunity to ask him.

child as commodity - out needs

No thoughtfulness from family to register

Other side feelings validation

Emotional sequelae - impact far reaching

irony - but far ch.
on the surface
(NB FE)

Contrast with her exp. of ch'hood, attachment to parents, finding her birth history is concealed in perpetuity

Intermittent attempts to find more - but frustration

grappling with never knowing on top of fact that adoption concealed.

I And your aunt, was she thoughtful about how hearing as late as you did, in the way that you did, might have been an experience for you.

Ah, [] not... not, no, no there never was any, no in fact I think its very important. It's only very recently, talking to other people who have been adopted, and having them, or ...er..., reading stuff, that suddenly the emotion, the emotional impact just to have it acknowledged is unbelievable, I mean that really does rattle things very deep.

emotional impact

Because, well, the general culture, and I think in France even more than in Britain, is really not to scratch under the surface, is just to take everything at face value - I mean everything, everybody did well. You know this birth mother got away scot-free, you know, in a Catholic country, ...er... you know, baby got a home and lonely ageing couple got the baby, you know I mean everything in the garden is fine.

And ...er..., its only through, yes, through reading and sharing with people, but mostly reading because there is something about the written word sometimes that just uh... expresses and its only recently I thought there's got to be something on the internet, there has got to be something, you know because there's a load of stuff on adoption from the States and Canada.

So I ran queries in French again, and for some reason I didn't give up, although it came up with nothing at all, I tried, I tried every now and then I would try, ...er..., I had to vanquish a lot of resistance in order to do that. ...er..., but one night I hit a web-site which is specifically for people who were registered under this under-x thing. And it's quite recent and the Association was formed in 1995 - the web-site's only been up for about ...a year, and ...er..., and I have been in touch with them and they are campaigning to have this thing abolished. And suddenly they listed - because it's a double thing you see, it's not only, I've talked to friends who have been adopted and they have been able to get hold of their adoptive parents and it's emotional enough its tough enough, but, I am coming to the point at which.... I am not sure that I will ever know, because.... because of the secrecy around the name,

emotional long term

Real story

Makes it worse -
nothing to follow
(cf JBH)

emotional consequences -

put ahead needs
first
sensitivity to
death.

some information
on which it can
rest
rethinking
re/ps re/ps - from
defining them
as 'new people'

and you can't, you know, you can't go through ...er... social security numbers or things like that...., or.... various records, without a surname. You know databases work, you know, the lead... would always be the surname. So ...er..., I, I.... **that double cloud it adds a great, an enormous depth to the stuff around the adoption, ...er...**

Real story

Yeah, I mean because the agency, you know if I had been adopted in normal circumstances without that added secrecy, I could have got through, you know, I could have found... And by this time my birth father would be 97, so he is most likely dead and buried, and my birth mother would be 90, so she may or may not be alive. And even she is, uh []... **I would ...probably not invade the life of a woman who may be dealing with a lot of other issues**, would be....er.... Although I don't know, I don't know about that, I mean I would only have to face that if I knew.

Search but
proactive

So it's almost like a grave I'm looking for, you know but **some sort of tangible existence**, because I have siblings, I mean my father had another child and my mother had two children, you know, so I had half-siblings somewhere in France who are, I know their ages, you know, they're between 50 and 60 now, if they are still alive. **So there are these people, who are my people, and they are totally beyond my reach because again, no name, no contact.**

Search

connections
leaving
r/ps.

But you can agree, because I have buried my adoptive parents, I know where there grave is, I have never been back, because I'm not, have never been interested at all in graves, and ...er... []... I mean if people are dead, they're dead. Except that that particular lot - my birth parents - I would need to go once, I wouldn't need to go any more than that.... []... And yeah, **I do need ...er... something tangible**, and reading that website, they had a whole load of stuff about the right of people to know where they are **otherwise you are nobody's child, is ...er...**

Search.

I How do you think your adoptive parents []...well, no let me ask you something ... do you think that telling your father, your adoptive father, that you knew had any impact on your relationship with him?

knowing P
about adoption
affected her →
parents, but
not in reverse.

[]... **I think had impact on my relationship with both**, but with both my parents **from my point of view**, but I think as far as he was concerned, I think he just put it aside really. I mean he was 85 at the time, so, and he died within three years.....
...er..., and I attended him a lot towards the end of his life ...er..., and supported him a lot, these ...er..., because very old people need some support sometimes. Although the Hospice where they were, was just amazing in their work.....the place....

Also I
ad. parents

...er..., yes, by then it was

I Do you think it affected you, in your relationship with them? How would you describe that?

R/p c fa.
P
apertiveness

respectful,
dutiful

Mostly with my mother, him not a lot because uh, I was quite separate from him in many respects, and as he grew older, and I mean as he neared his death, and as I say he needed support because he really went ...he really committed suicide by stopping eating and stopping drinking and really that was his only way of getting out of his situation. And ...er... [] and I treated him really like I would have treated any other human being in dire need of a friend, and of dignity and of all that but also, I suppose I did. Yes, ...er... [] we had had, he and I, just one instance of abuse which was not pleasant which I only remembered in my late twenties. ...er... which I held against him for a very long time. ...er... (), I needed to, to be with him and clear that, well clear it, not verbally ...because he was beyond even that then, ...er..., so yeah, so I spent some time with him, ...er..., more as a just a ...er..., yes

R/p c fa.

after
revelation

R/p c fa.
distance

He never played the role of father to me apart from maybe teaching me about gardens and garden plants and a little bit about the natural world and ...[]... that. But ...[]... yes, I mean we weren't close whereas with my mother it was very different. ...er..., she had Alzheimer, so between the age 75 and 91 when she died, and it got progressively worse, and I did want desperately her to have some sort of, some sort of connection with the past, and that was getting worse and worse, and I even showed her photographs of herself with her mother and her brother when she was a child and she could not, she had no idea who they were.

R/p c fa.

Mo - after
revelation

Mo's admission,
acknowledgement
impact - final cut
in sense of belonging

feeling that it
hadn't been such
an imp. exp.
Cammediety

link so tenuous

But I remember, I mean she always asked me when I came to visit her at the Hospice which was very often, it was twice a month, which from here to France is quite a long way. She always asked me who I was and I used to say "well I'm M , I'm your daughter" and she would just let it and just nod and when she said "you can't be" she said, " we never had children", and I think at that point I really gave up.

after revel

I gave up, I just thought 'no, you old people have you know, you had the use of this child', and you know, of course it was true, they never had children, but its you know, its, its such a surface experience for you. God!

ch - as
Cammediety

genetics / blood

and which
she + parents did not have

But you know, in the end it is not even there anymore, its been washed away, the....the...English expression, you know, 'blood runs thicker than water' I mean, there is no equivalent in French, but I had to have it explained to me when I first heard it - I thought it sounded a bit gory (laughs). But I can still, you know, at that point you realise this is so true, I mean there is something about biological bonds which are very strong.

after
revel

le-thinks
r/p

Appendix 12.

Stages in the IPA process

i) List of emergent themes in order of appearance in the text

No suspicions	(1.16)
Impact	(1.20)I was quiet shocked (1.22)(1.32) (1.35)I was completely panicked (2.6)(2.9)
Identity	(1.47) 'who's little girl are you?'(1.49) (2.2)
Search for self in self	(2.13)(2.16)(2.23)
Emotions later	(2.25)(3.11)(10.20)(22.43)(23.4)(23.7)(23.9) (23.29)
Rethinking relationships	(2.29)(2.32)(3.2)(12.18)(12.21)(12.40) (13.42)(13.46)
The process of searching	(2.48)(3.5)(5.38)(5.45)(5.46)(6.12)(12.17) (12.30)
Communicating about the secret	(3.10)(3.19)(10.8)(10.18)
Intensity of secret	(3.26)(3.30)(16.35)(16.46)(22.4)
The baby as a commodity	(3.36)(3.43)(4.30)(4.44)(5.16)(9.39)(13.32) (13.38)
People holding the secret	(3.48)(4.14)(4.23)(22.2)
Loyalty & protection/sensitivity	(5.40)(12.11)
Finding the real story	(6.14)(6.19)(6.43)(6.46)(7.7)(8.40) (9.1)(11.39)
Covering up the truth	(7.24)(7.26)(17.12)(17.17)(17.34)(17.39) (25.13)
The birth certificate/documents	(7.43)(8.8)(8.17)(8.45)
Impact of real story	(9.11)(9.24)(9.30)(11.46)(11.49)(12.4)
Unanswered questions	(10.21)(11.10)
Experiences with father in ch/hood	(10.32)(10.33)(10.46)(13.4)(13.9) (13.19)(13.21)
Powerful mother	(11.2)(14.8)(16.40)(16.42)
Vaildation of feelings	(11.17) in family (11.18)
On the surface	(11.26)
Effects on other relationships	(15.32)(15.42)(16.26)
Supports/friendships	(16.4)(16.8)(16.14)
Sense of not belonging/fragility	(18.4)(18.32)(19.1)(18.28)(19.18)(19.21) (19.31)(19.43)(20.1)(20.8)
Making sense	(20.24)
Belonging	(20.34)(20.38)(20.40)(20.47)
Contradictory ideas about mother	(23.25)(23.38)(23.45)

ii) List of clustered themes

Emotional Sequelae

Impact (1.20)I was quite shocked (1.22)(1.32)
(1.35)I was completely panicked (2.6)(2.9)
Emotions later (2.25)(3.11)(10.20)(22.43)(23.4)(23.7)(23.9)
(23.19)

Impact on sense of self

Identity (1.47)(1.49)(2.2)
Search for self in self (2.13)(2.16)(2.23)

Wall of silence

Communicating about the secret (3.10)(3.15)(10.8)
Intensity of secret (3.26)(3.30)(16.35)(16.46)(22.4)
Covering up the truth (7.24)(7.26)(17.12)(17.17)(17.34)
(17.39)(25.13)
People holding the secret (3.48)(4.14)(4.23)(22.2)
Powerful mother (11.2)(14.8)(16.40)(16.42)

Whose little girl am I ?

The process of searching (2.48)(3.5)(5.38)(5.45)(5.46)(6.12)(12.17)
(12.30)
Finding the real story (6.14)(6.17)(6.43) (6.46)(7.7)(8.40)
(9.1)(11.39)
The birth certificate/documents (7.43)(8.8)(8.17)(8.45)
Impact of real story (9.11)(9.24)(9.30)(11.46)(11.49)(12.4)
Loyalty & protection/sensitivity (5.40)(12.11)
Unanswered questions (10.21)(11.10)

Relationships

Rethinking relationships (2.28)(2.32)(3.2)(12.18)(12.21)(12.40)
(13.42)(13.47)
Effects on other relationships (15.32)(15.38)(15.42)(16.26)

Childhood experiences

Experiences with father in ch/hood(10.32)(10.33)(10.46)(13.4)(13.9)(13.19)
(13.21)
Sense of not belonging/fragility (18.4)(18.31)(19.1)(18.28)(19.18)(19.21)
(19.31)(19.43)(20.1)(20.8)
Belonging (20.34)(20.38)(20.40)(20.47)
Contradictory ideas about mother (23.25)(23.38)(23.45)

The baby as a commodity (3.36)(4.30)(4.44)(5.16)(9.39)(13.32)
(13.38)

Also
Validation of feelings (11.17) in family (11.18)
Supports/friendships (16.3)(16.8)(16.14)
Making sense (20.24)
On the surface (11.26)
No suspicions (1.16)

iii) List of clustered themes grounded in the text

Emotional Sequelae

Impact

(1.20) I was quite shocked

(1.22) I.....put it aside to think about because I needed to go to work, uh, so I went to work and then... I couldn't concentrate – I was in, I was in a state of shock

(1.35) I was completely panicked

(2.6) I could not take my clothes off either, it was very, very acute.

(2.9) I brushed my teeth closing my eyes, it was that acute.

Emotions later

(2.25) Later, there was a lot more grief around all that, ..because...and that has never stopped,and thirteen years later I'm still dealing with this

(3.11) there was a lot of anger

(10.20) I had a huge amount of resentment

(22.43) they say that it's not going to be easy..... and I, every time I have to break through resistance, at every stage you know

(23.4)].....I dread to bring to the surface the pain attached to it all

23.7) the pain is enormous

(23.9) it's the depth of that , the depth of the grief.....

(23.19) [anger] Absolutely utterly directed at my adopted mother

Impact on sense of self

Identity

(1.47) 'who's little girl are you?'

(1.49) I just could not face that for...for quite a while. It.....It was almost as if my image in the mirror lied to me too

(2.2) I was frightened because I was looking at this stranger. So it was two things, one, it was a stranger and ...er..not only that it was a ...er...lying stranger

Search for self in self

(2.13) I really started to look very searchingly, ...er..., I really needed then to look at myself the way I had never looked at myself

(2.16) it was just really a searching look because I had absolutely no idea ..[]..er.. how I was feeling about myself anymore, ...er... [].... It's a very big blank...[]... I am thinking "I am a complete questionmark to myself, I am a complete enigma", you know. I thought I knew you/me but I don't.

(2.23) things like gene bank, thinking "how do I know whether I have inherited anything,

'Sworn to secrecy' (16.35)

Communicating about the secret

(3.10) I did not talk to them about my adoption

(3.15) I talked to him, in fact immediately after the revelation, like, within a couple of days after the opening of the letter, I spoke to him on the phone and I said to him "you know I have just discovered that I was adopted and, you know, can you tell me more about it." And he said, "well, there's nothing much to say, we loved you as our child and that is all there is to be said."

(10.8) he made it very clear that that's all there was to say and therefore, he didn't see that there was any point in... you know, there were things to do with emotions, or talking about that

Intensity of secret

(3.26) she [aunt] said "yes, you were adopted" and she said, "your mother was so fierce about it all because she swore utterly everybody to secrecy".

(3.30) "And", she said, "she's burnt all your papers, and we were sworn on the pain of death to never ever let on that you were adopted,

(16.35) She [aunt] had been sworn to secrecy and you know, I mean, yes, I don't think it occurred to people to break my mother's injunctions

(16.46) if they had sworn to her that they would not tell, you know, they would die with the secret because they knew that she would never betray anyone, I mean that integrity is one of my mother's things.

(22.4) nobody really told me the truth.

Covering up the truth

(7.24) Before that, my mother always got it [birth certificate] for me, bless her, she would wouldn't she?

(7.26) it was always an extract

(17.12) —, I was given an explanation that because of her age she needed to go to a specialist hospital rather than just a run-of-the-mill maternity down the road, which I didn't investigate any further.

(17.17) I said to her tell me all about my birth, and she, my goodness, she () just, you know, avoided the subject, you know, I mean she really flustered (17.34) she said something, you know, like "mother's usually are"

(17.39) And changed the subject very quickly

(25.13) there was something about my mother having some fibroids removed at the time that she would have been pregnant with me and I did ask at one point, you know, whether that had affected her pregnancy, and she said, "no, no not at all", and at the time I felt that its like she had mentioned the operation without mentioning the fact that she was pregnant

People holding the secret

(3.48) And obviously her [aunt's] husband who by then had died – my uncle.

(4.14) obviously all the neighbours knew because, I mean, you know, my mother appeared with a child not having gone through a pregnancy obviously

(4.23) somebody else who knew about it were... the people my mother worked with

(22.2) I'm sure that Rochelle, my Nanny, knew that I was adopted

Powerful mother

(11.2) my only guess is that it was really my mother that since she really ruled the roost I think she was absolutely top boss, you know, she wanted a child and he had just gone along when he really didn't...or... he had no idea of what the reality of a child would be, compared to the idea.

(14.8) because I know she was a very powerful woman

(16.40) she.... was a very, very, strong woman.

(16.42) she was just strong in the sense that people relied on her far and wide, you know she was just very responsible, very brave ...er..., []..... yes, just a very extraordinary character – highly, highly respected by the people who knew her

Whose little girl am I ?

The process of searching

(2.48) I was very busy, emotionally, my emotions were needed in other areas for quite a while.

(3.5) it got reawakened I mean then sort of was shelved and

(5.38) I let it be for years,

(5.45) I didn't feel I was ready

(5.46) a lot of people said that "are you not desperate to know?" and I said "well, no not really, I'm very mixed about it"

(6.12) so I went there but I didn't even have the guts to go in and it had, it was a clinic, so, you know, it was just as anonymous as anything else really.

(12.17) So it's almost like a grave I'm looking for, you know but some sort of tangible existence

Loyalty & protection/sensitivity

(5.40) I didn't feel, because I was told by my aunt how crucial it was to my mother not....for no-one to know, and especially me, obviously, well, especially me not to know. I felt it would be disloyal to start searches before they were both dead, for some reason - well, before she was dead anyway

(12.11) I wouldprobably not invade the life of a woman [birth mother] who may be dealing with a lot of other issues,

Finding the real story

(6.14) in fact it was only last year that I have started making the searches, so, you know, that's a long time has elapsed. ...er..., but the French system, which is what I am hitting now,

(6.17) only France and Luxembourg have a system that they call 'sous-x, which is "under x", which is a system whereby a mother can withhold her name - and the father
 (6.43) I found that heart-breaking to hear that, specially a culture that is so attached to babies and to, you know, family, you know, could hand over a child and never to see it again, and never to have it claim its origins.
 (6.46) I find that just unbelievably sad
 (7.7) , "the point about it is that even us, we do not have a record, there just is not a record of the name of your parents."
 (8.40) so there is still a huge amount of security awareness around all these things
 (9.1) Sous-x its called in French, so it's under-x, uh because it means you are declared under, as an "x", which is an extraordinary..., I mean emotionally it's quite hard

The birth certificate/documents

(7.43) A completely different name, so that it for me, you know, it was a wrong birth certificate, it was somebody else's,
 (8.8) So its, so at least they kept my two original names but they shoved them along and introduced another name.
 (8.17) So its like all those names are lined up and are all reference to different people, but they are all references to first names, not one of them are surnames.
 (8.45) it was very, very interesting – it was quite complete, it had.....except, you know, surnames.

Impact of real story

(9.11)The great shock was to discover that my parents were a lot older than I expected
 (9.24) it was an extraordinary experience for me to read that stuff
 (9.30) So, you know, it felt like very healthy stock – that's quite comforting and reassuring.
 (11.46) it's a double thing you see, it's not only, I've talked to friends who have been adopted and they have been able to get hold of their adoptive parents and it's emotional enough, its tough enough
 (11.49) I am not sure that I will ever know
 (12.4) that double cloud it adds a great, an enormous depth to the stuff around the adoption

Unanswered questions

(10.21) I mean the huge question really was "why" [adopt a child at all], you know, "why", but that one I never got to ask
 (11.10) going out of your way to get one, bring one in (laughs) to be that unpleasant is really strange, but I never had the opportunity to ask him.

Relationships

Rethinking relationships

(2.29) my adopted father had two brothers who died before I was born but their stories of heroism and all that were certainly not my stories.
 (2.32) all the lore of your childhood suddenly becomes irrelevant, you know. You don't belong in that tribe, you don't belong to that group and that is very ...isolating
 (3.2) I realised how much I missed, I missed all that..... []...all that folklore, all that, ...er..... It was gradual actually, it was very gradual,
 (12.18) I have siblings, I mean my father had another child and my mother had two children, you know, so I had half-siblings somewhere in France who are, I know their ages, you know, they're between 50 and 60 now, if they are still alive.
 (12.21) . So there are these people, who are my people, and they are totally beyond my reach because again, no name, no contact.
 (12.40)I think had impact on my relationship with both, both my parents from my point of view
 (13.42) in the end it is not even there anymore, its been washed away
 (13.47) there is something about biological bonds which are very strong,

Effects on other relationships

(15.32) so we don't have to be nice about Grandpapa anymore"
 (15.38) I don't think that it affected my relationship with a lot of other people, generally
 (15.42) there is a sort of bond [with other adopted people] there because , you know, you have losses that other people don't begin to understand.
 (16.26) My children they're curious

Childhood experiences

Experiences with father in childhood

(10.32) my father was rabidly jealous of me

(10.33) my mother could not give me any attention whatsoever, without him making,behaving like a very, very hurt and jealous kid.

(10.46) he used to be very hostile to me:- at family meals he used to always attack me, or if I shared anything that I had done at school that I was interested in it would be quite verbally violently put down.

(13.4) I was quite separate from him in many respects (13.9)

(13.19) He never played the role of father to me apart from maybe teaching me about gardens and garden plants and a little bit about the natural world

(13.21) we weren't close

Sense of not belonging/fragility

(18.4) in my case it was very acute because I thought I don't really look like them, I don't feel...I don't feel any affinity with either of them

(18.31) she was in fact telling me the truth, that is that I didn't belong there.

(19.1) I didn't feel very reassured by that, I felt that exactly affirmed, my hunch was right, there's some, I don't really....., I'm here on her tolerance and I really knew it then. I knew that..... it was definitely behaviour, behaviour dependent – if I behaved well I could stay, if I didn't, you know, God knows.

(18.28) , it's your parent's house" And now I was so devastated at that, I mean, so devastated it remained with me for years,

(19.18) absolute panic

(19.21) I had caught them out, and if I let them know that I caught them, God knows what would happen. It was so dangerous for me to actually let them know something

(19.31) suddenly my safety, everything, my world was completely shattered if they knew I was there, I could never live, I mean I could live, you know it would shatter everything and I would have to go, you know I would have, I don't know, to die sort of thing.

(19.43) I never, never felt that I could tell her [about father's inappropriate sexual advance]

(20.1) I thought she would choose him

(20.8) there was nothing I could reveal about their secrets,

Belonging

(20.34) my uncle we were very close, although he lived 300 miles away, when we saw each other, we were very close and we just loved each other very much

(20.38) so I was totally loved by him

(20.39) he died of a heart-attack just 'whoomph' like that. And I went into complete decline and I had a serious breakdown

(20.47) that was really because I felt that I belonged, you know, he was my sort of part-father as it were, the person that I identified with

Contradictory ideas about mother

(23.25) I was close, I adored her and we were very, very close, and she adored me

(23.38) I really see my adoptive mother as somebody who put an enormous mask

(23.45) I was really terrified....., terrified, and I felt the same effect if I told her about my, my father's ...[]... actions, she, I would be just too terrified to tell her

The baby as a commodity

(3.36) was I handed over the counter?

(4.30) and it was then that she adopted me after she had passed her...all her career..., passed a particular point in her career. And she then felt ready – in my less charitable moments I felt "yes, she got to that point, then she could buy a baby".

(4.44) they actually had me live at a nanny's house and I only came to their house at the weekends

(5.16) Obviously my mother was working very hard for promotion and everything, and just could not, could not have me around.

(9.39) In some baby farm somewhere, because I was handed for adoption on the day of my birth

(13.32) She always asked me who I was and I used to say "well I'm Martine, I'm your daughter" and she would just let it and just nod and when she said "you can't be" she said, "we never had children", and I think at that point I really gave up.

(13.38) I gave up, I just thought 'no, you old people haveyou know, you had the use of this child',

NOT GROUPEd BUT SEEM IMPORTANT

Validation of feelings

(11.17) not, no, no there never was any, [in family]

(11.18) I think its very important. It's only very recently, talking to other people who have been adopted, and having them, or ...er..., reading stuff, that suddenly the emotion, the emotional impact just to have it acknowledged is unbelievable

On the surface (11.26)

at face value – I mean everything, everybody did well. You know this birth mother got away scot-free, you know, in a Catholic country , ...er... you know, baby got a home and lonely ageing couple got the baby, you know I mean everything in the garden is fine.

No suspicions (1.16)

had absolutely no conscious awareness of it. Absolutely none.

Appendix 13. Feedback for participant

Summary of preliminary analysis 'Martine'

Emotional sequelae

You described the enormous impact of discovering as an adult that you had been adopted. There was an immediate sense of shock, numbness and a strong physical reaction to bathing and looking at yourself in the mirror. As time went on you experienced powerful feelings of loss, grief and sadness along with hurt and resentment. It has been, and continues to be a painful struggle to integrate the information about your own origins, and anger, particularly towards your mother has returned from time to time.

Impact on sense of self

Your description indicated that the impact on your sense of self was profound, that the revelation swept away your sense of self knowledge and left you with many questions about who you were.

'Sworn to secrecy'

The theme of secrets and of lies was very evident throughout. This included your discovery of who had known about your adoption, how it had been covered up or avoided and your mother's insistence that the fact of your adoption remained unspoken. Your own attempts to raise it with your father met with a clear unwillingness to have any further discussion.

Whose little girl am I?

The process of finding out more about your origins has been slow, partly because loyalty to your adoptive parents inhibited you, and also as other aspects of your life and relationships took precedence. You appeared to have developed some possible stories about your origins which made the finding out of actual details a further shock. You spoke of the power of seeing documents relating to you, the enormity of finding that a little used French law prevented you from reaching the identity of anyone in your birth family. Many unanswerable questions were left for you.

Relationships

The revelation had an impact on the relationships between you and your parents, and how you saw your connection with other people that you had believed yourself to be related to. Although you and your mother never discussed the adoption, your knowledge of it led you to re-evaluate the relationship and gave a different meaning to contact with her. Your own children also felt the shift in relation to their 'grandfather'.

Childhood experiences

Many of the memories you shared about your childhood were about feelings of insecurity, a sense of not belonging and a lack of safety. You described your father as rather distant, and often jealous when your mother's attention was directed your way. Although you felt you and her were close, you also described a lack of trust, and a sense that she would believe and support your father before you. This fragile context was contrasted with the strong bond that developed between you and your uncle.

The baby as a commodity

This theme reflected your feelings of having been a superficial part of the family and brought into it at a convenient point in their lives. The arrangements made for your care (during the week at a nanny's house) also contributed to the feeling that you had been used by them for their needs, and your own had been minimised.

Appendix 14.

Responses from participants about the research process

Rosa wrote

During the interview I had some insights that I had never had before. Specifically, that I was being such a compliant and "good" daughter by ignoring the truth. It was always important for me to keep the peace in my family. I was the eldest and it was often my job to make sure things were quiet and non-disruptive in the household. I was singled out As the one "in charge" to make sure no one made loud noises or messes.

No bad effects. Just the comments above about it being revealing to me (my behavior, that is.) Having conducted interviews, I was familiar with the process. I felt as comfortable as I could have. I appreciate having been in my own surroundings. I felt it lasted the right amount of time.

Juliette

I went haring off to [shopping centre] feeling sorry for myself. I just need to do something for me – so I just cancelled the rest of my diary for the day and um... told my secretary I was ill, and spent a fortune. I needed time on my own – I never have time on my own to think anything through.

I thought it was quite good, because I've never ever have had the opportunity to talk about it in such depth.

It made me realise I'm not the only one in the world to have this, and the fact that you're doing a piece of research on it, it's obviously a big enough issue for people to take it seriously. So instead of just a lone voice in the wilderness thinking – I've got this particular problem and I can't find out – I felt, well, hang on – there are other people with the same sort of problem. So that gave me hope that maybe I will be able to fathom it through even if it's only for myself. Fathom out better the way I feel about it. So that was positive.

Chrissi

I suppose it brought it all back to me, made it more...in my mind again. At one time I talked about it all the time, telling everybody. People don't ask me so much now. So it brought it all back to me.

It was fine, absolutely fine, I didn't mind at all.

I wasn't distressed at all.

Ella

It was positive, it wasn't anything negative. It was distressing, yes, it was distressing... um... but ... I went from you to my mum and Reg, and I deliberately took my time... but the right kind of distressing. You get in touch with a few things that you've been holding down. It gave me a lot to think about and I'm still feeding off it in some way.

Fiona

You asked some questions that I'd never thought of before, it made me think. It put another perspective on it and made me think a bit more about it. It helped, sort of thinking new things about it. And like actually realising I'm not the only one. It's researching a load of people, it's not just me, there are other people out there like me. That's nice to know.

Melanie

Was it unhelpful?

No, talking about it can only help. Maybe I've got a long period of talking about it to go through before it's out the other side and exorcised, because there have been several stages of it. They've all got together at the end, stacked up, or I've been stacking them for years.

Jill

I thought about it afterwards and I was trying to think have been accurate, have I missed anything that was particularly relevant. So I thought about the whole thing and how I thought about it now, and what's gone on since then.

It was quite good, it made me, or I found myself trying to put things together, and thinking about it in terms of themes – like what impact had it had, and had it affected my relationships and why hadn't I gone to find my biological father. Even thinking about it led to the same response that I gave you, what would be the point – I still agree with that.

It made me think about it, think about myself now in relation to the impact of that – when I was first told and the consequences and results for me since then. It didn't have a negative effect, I think I was surprised at blanks in my memory.

It wasn't a negative experience.

I wasn't too sure quite what to expect, I didn't find it intrusive or painful. It was quite interesting, I found myself thinking laterally, thinking about other aspects. It was quite good for me in many ways, almost, but not quite – semi-therapeutic. In terms of making it coherent to myself. By talking about it I found I reiterated the account I already had, so it kind of deepened my ... it... deepened my understanding as I already had it. But it also...I re-visited somethings and just, checked them out again.

It was quite, a different angle, it was quite ... it rounded off my original interpretation of it. A completion in some ways. My thoughts and beliefs were consistent with discussing it with my mother. There weren't any surprises.

Martine

It has been an interesting experience for me. After you came, I found myself much more upset than I have been for a long time. Fortunately I was with friends who know the story... and it wasn't anything bad. Just going over it again – hurts deeply.

Dierdre

It's interesting how much I have thought about it since talking to you about it, It threw me much more than I realised. That probably there is somewhere in me that says, 'What if I'm not?

I thought a hell of a lot after I spoke to you last, about - why didn't I pursue it? Now it seems so odd to me, that I didn't, in view of the way the story has ended since Raoul's death.

Just talking without being interrupted – I haven't done that kind of thing and so what it did was bring up the feelings I had about it much more strongly than I realised. Obviously I knew they were there, but they are obviously are much stronger than I acknowledge that they are. So I found them disturbing in that sense, not at all in a bad way, just, made me think – there you see, you haven't actually dealt with it.

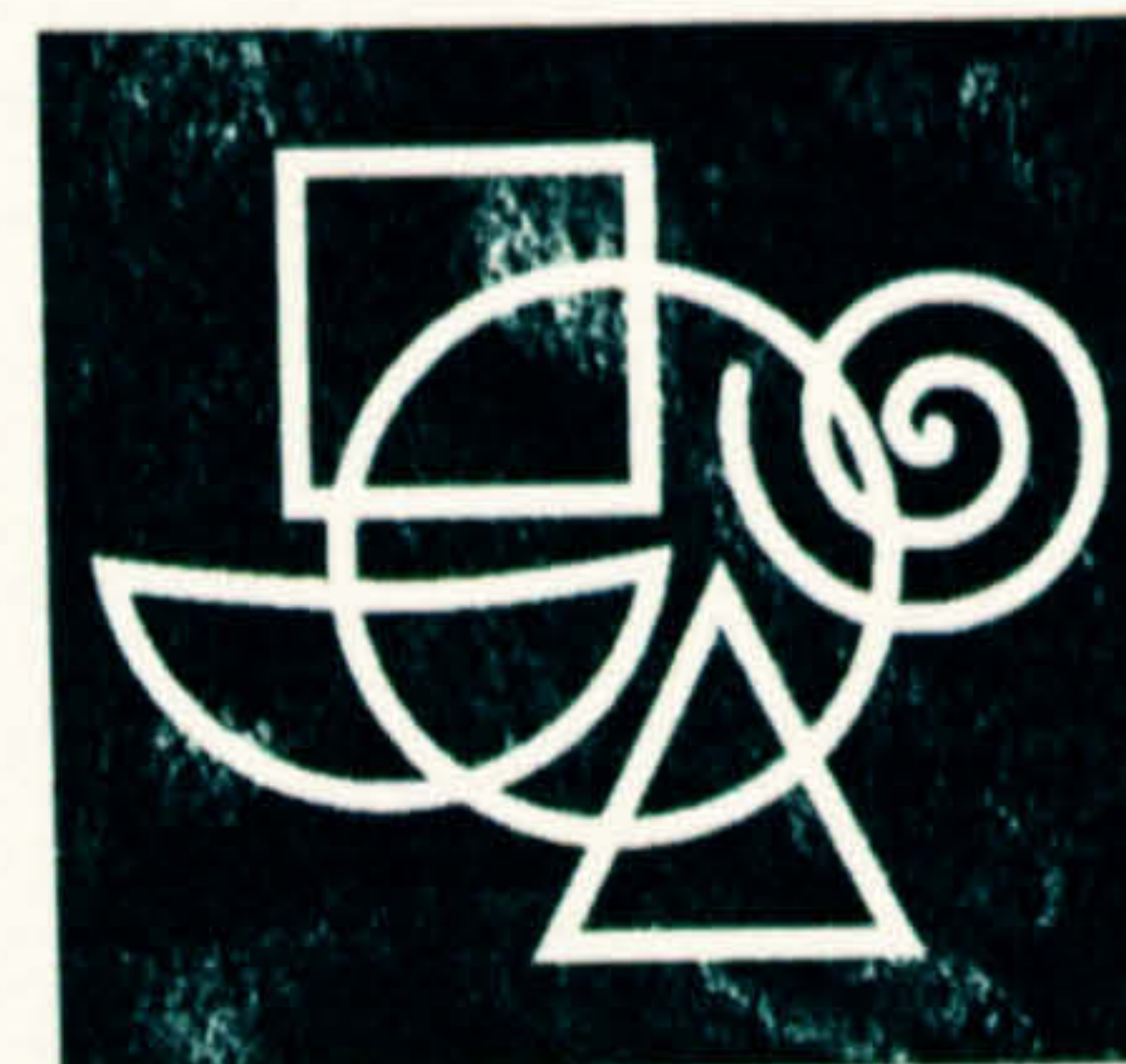
Edith

Wasn't too bad at all. Not like it would have been – I wouldn't have attempted to do it...years ago. But I knew, I know if it does help for understanding for somebody else then perhaps with all the knowledge it will help them.

Appendix 15. Covering letter and feedback on group themes

Salomons Centre
David Salomons Estate
Broomhill Road, Southborough
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Kent TN3 0TG

Telephone: 01892 515152
Facsimile: 01892 539102



SALOMONS
CENTRE

April 17th 1999

Dear ,

'Family secrets about biological parentage'.

I am writing to thank you again for participating in my research on the effects of hearing that the identity of one or both of your parents was not as you had thought. I found your comments on the individual analysis I shared with you very helpful, and I have now completed the analysis of the material from the whole group.

As I promised I am sending you this information, and I have enclosed the details about the themes that emerged for the group. While I will not be able to include any of your reactions to the group feedback in my final thesis because of the deadline, I would be very interested to hear your thoughts about them. I am enclosing a stamped addressed label for you to use.

I very much appreciated the time you gave me, and without your willingness, and that of others like yourself, this research would not have been possible.

With all good wishes,

Sharon Pettle
Consultant Clinical Psychologist

enc/3 pages

Feedback on group themes

Information about participants

Twelve people participated in this study. Five had discovered that they had been adopted, three found out that they had been created using donated sperm and four had grown up in some form of stepfamily. The circumstances for each individual varied considerably, but a number of themes emerged that were common.

Themes

1. Many people referred to the enormous **emotional impact** that the revelation had on them. The shock and distress described suggested that for many the information was beyond anything that they were prepared for. A few people spoke of this period lasting quite a short time, and of having feelings of relief at not being biologically connected to someone with whom they had a difficult relationship. Others experienced profound and painful psychological effects and had a struggle to comprehend the facts and to acknowledge the inherent experience of lies and concealment.

For many the revelation began a chain of events as they attempted to integrate the new information. The **emotional effects of later related events** included depression, confusion, and anger. Some of these related to the difficulty of making sense of the new information, the demanding experience of searching for birth relatives and the despair experienced when information could not be obtained or was deliberately withheld. Some people were very clear that although the experience had been many years earlier, they continued to feel deeply affected by it.

2. The revelation took away a degree of certainty that many participants had assumed in their lives, but the impact they experienced on their ideas about **identity and self** varied. For some it felt like a fundamental blow, and shook the basic premises on which they had built their idea of who they were. It appeared difficult to articulate, but what was conveyed was that some essential and basic part had been taken away.

Some participants indicated that they felt themselves dislocated from the family context, as their assumed biological connection with or some of the family was destroyed in an instant. Their family history, or part of it, was swept away with little to replace the void left behind. They felt they had to review their idea of **self in the context of relationships** given the new information.

3. Everyone described **ripples in relationships**. Shifts in closeness and distance were common and appeared linked to changes in how they viewed others, or how they themselves were viewed once they knew of their origins. This repositioning happened **in the family in which they grew up, with parents, and siblings**. Where relationships had been difficult, they often became more fraught. Occasionally a stronger bond was reported, and this was usually linked to the family member responding in a supportive and open manner.

Some of you talked about the impact in families you had created, such as when partners and children had lived through your distress, or when you were searching to find out more about yourself. Sometimes children had been told the secret but then asked to keep it from other members of the family. **Newly found relatives** were sometimes welcomed and welcoming. Some of you found the contact with aunts, uncles, other half siblings, and cousins very disturbing as you questioned where you belonged, but these connection with 'blood' relatives were very important, particularly for people who had been adopted.

4. **Childhood experiences** of insecurity, feelings of not belonging or experiences of not being cared about were often mentioned. Many of you referred to your **experiences of parenting** as unhappy, or marked by **conflicted and contrasting relationships**. A close relationship with one parent and a marked distance from the other, or closeness but a lack of security and trust were mentioned by many. It was often reported that the information about origins helped to make some of these experiences more understandable

Many of you described an **awareness of difference**; being aware that you looked different to other family members. This did create doubts for some people about their relatedness. Although physical similarity clearly carried a great deal of significance, differential treatment and favouritism were also common experiences. A number of you recounted examples of times when you had felt less cared for, or accepted, than another child in the family. For those who did not have these experiences, strong physical resemblance helped to explain why you had had not doubts about your parentage before the revelation.

5. **Communication within the family** about your origins varied. In some families this was common knowledge to everyone, especially in the case of adoption. Mothers were often seen as the instigators of the secret, and perceived as demanding a degree of loyalty from family members and friends that were told that could not be challenged. Fathers were seen as passive by comparison. These loyalties often extended beyond the parents' lifetimes. Other people knowing before you often created strong feelings of discomfort and raised a question about rights. In some of the DI and stepfamily situations the number of people aware of the secret was very limited, requiring other people in the family to adapt to the information too.

A number of participants experienced their homes as places where it seemed there were 'family rules' that questions could not be asked, or where curiosity was not allowed. Direct questions were often deflected or ignored. Certain areas of discussion were avoided, such as pregnancy and menstruation, as if these might lead dangerously close to the secret.

Communication after discovery or revelation often remained problematic, or became more so. In many participants' experiences, secret holders were unwilling to acknowledge the existence of the secret at first, denying that there was any truth in it. Even if it was confirmed, many relations were unwilling to give any further information or decline to discuss the issue further.

This resulted in you being denied opportunities to talk about the revelation and its impact, and ask questions.

In a minority of situations there was one person who was willing to openly and supportively share information. But this was in contrast to a general tendency towards **avoidance in the family**, there was a strong sense that other family members, even those who had also been unaware, would rather the issue was not discussed. There was little willingness to hear about how the revelation had affected you in the short or longer term and this often left people feeling isolated in their family.

At the extreme, in a few families there was an **insistence on the secret being kept** and sometimes implicit or explicit threats were made about the consequences of making it open. While this meant that the family could continue to function as if the secret did not exist, it raised uncomfortable loyalty binds and conflicts for those involved. The subject was sometimes only re-opened after many years.

6. Many of you had attempted to understand how and why the secret had developed in your family. **Explanations** fell into three main areas: the social context, meeting parental needs and as protection of their child. Many of you had considered the social context at the time of your birth - the possible stigma attached to adoption, DI or the relative scarcity of stepfamilies in the past. Some of you acknowledged your parent's possible sense of shame for their actions or wish to keep up appearances, and fear of being rejected. Some of you felt that the motivation for secrecy might have included some concern about you, and represented an effort to protect.

Despite this, and often a feeling of sympathy and compassion for parents, many of you felt that the concealment was unacceptable, particularly when this had extended into adulthood. Where the information had been revealed personally and not through documents explanations were also created for why the secret had been revealed at that particular time. Many of these suggested a destructive element, or that circumstances had forced the issue (e.g. imminent parental divorce). None of you experienced the sense that the revelation followed a thoughtful decision based on a 'your right to know' or felt that the likely impact on you had been considered.

Appendix 16. Research Diary

11th March 1998

In the last month I have been grappling with the process of writing the dissertation proposal and I have felt both excited and daunted by the prospect. The recent learning set focused on some of the distinctions within qualitative analyses and has helped me have a clearer idea of now I might analyse my data. Just as significantly, it pushed me to start articulating the guiding hypotheses behind my research, and clarify the questions. The act of making them clearer and separate has felt important.

So, I have revised the proposal accordingly, and am interested in receiving Rudi's comments thereon. It really feels as if it is beginning to take shape and I am aware of how carefully I need to be organised to see it through.

In a more broad way, my recent personal contact with Alexina McWhinnie has confirmed that my attempt to research secrets is a meaningful one, and could contribute to the openness/secretcy debate in the DI world. I am aware of my personal belief that openness is preferable, and that I have professional concerns about how children grow up in families where this is not the case. But I am also very conscious of the elements that may push people into keeping information undisclosed. Attending the DI Network day was beneficial, and I felt deeply impressed by those families who were struggling to engage in an on-going process of openness with their children. I have written to them regarding a brief 'call for participants'.

The recruitment of participants remains an anxiety, even though I need a minimum of 10. I know I will feel more confident when I have sufficient number. I am considering writing to The Psychologist, putting an advert in the Guardian, and must decide whether or not to re-contact Sarah Boseley about the possible article.

The consultation with Arlene helped me to think more about the interview schedule.

July 1998

Ran workshop focusing on methodological aspects of my research and the subject area. About 10 people came and were very interested in the research. I had thought to run it as a Delphi model group, but it seemed it wasn't going that way. So I divided people into pairs and got them looking at the 'Let the offspring speak' transcripts.

I kept notes from the discussion that followed:

Dominant discourse around adoption – abandonment, rejection, tougher on women, mothers who give up their child v. DI men donating, offering, not abandonment. Refer to literature on stepfamilies – higher expectations of s/mothers and generally more negative relationships with s/children (Gorrell Barnes et al 1998). Talkability: the topic of secrets generally difficult to talk about even at societal level – no service geared to it, where would you go to discuss, work through, consider implications.

Legal rights may change for DI as they have in adoption, but legal status of Birth Certificates? Not clear that must not lie (as if it is an unspoken assumption that you will tell the truth), but can leave out as vital a piece of information as father. In DI – it has been sanctioned, legislated against honesty. Push for change comes from offspring – who want rights to information.

Effects of not being able to find out:

- . Adoption may be hard but access
- . DI can not know
- . Other situations where birth certificate does not provide information mean that the informant may know this, may tell.

The wish to search related to identity issues – what happens to the similarities and connections that you thought you had, what happens to all that comes before.
Duration of secret: do people told later talk differently about it? Whether the main secret keepers are alive or dead? Does the length of concealment impact on trust/betrayal experience?

Degrees of trauma in the content e.g. child who is the product of incest, father was a murderer etc. These add another dimension to the revelation not only who you ARE but also who you ARE not. Idea of loss: grieving.

How secret revealed – direct or indirect? The timing of telling: around another major change (birth, deaths) rather than a time thought to be good for the unaware. Both v. one parent being secret keepers. Impact on partnership? Is it better for child if father believes he is the parent? Intuition (paper on animals recognising genetic links, aggression / destructive) Who intuitively knows? Coalitions. Extended family and others aware or not?

I looked up various scribbles I have made at other times to try and think about them too. How can we explain different views? Possibly parents and 'children' growing up in different times and social contexts, different positions in the secret system e.g. holder/unaware.

Denial of implications for DI families deny the development of services where parents can rethink decision, or could consider how to open the secret in the way that creates the least damage. No supportive context to support family through revelation, to increase the chance of maintaining positive relationships or developing new ways of relating.

Other presentations, conversations and thoughts that were provoked at the conference were that in genetic studies 10% of subjects are lost as they are not/can not be related in the way needed e.g. child/parent. Ethical considerations: information not revealed to participants. I wish I could find a reference to this work, I keep hearing about it, in a number of contexts.

Find out more about The Life Story interview ref in GGB book, Also retrospective. Fiona Tasker on childhood adjustment in adults who grew up in lesbian led families. (McWhinnie too). Retrospective view has drawbacks, may widen the gap between reality and construction, exacerbate negatives in the light of revealed information, or become less stigmatised because of better adult r/p. May be I should include the question: How has your description of relationships in your childhood changed since you found out the secret / since the revelation?

Theoretical understanding of parental motivation (= or – sympathy with it) does not = agreement. Personal experience may mean feelings of betrayal despite 'understanding'. Can not research prospectively families who chose secrecy, except maybe by setting up a very long-term study of large sample of DI families?

Adoptive parents earlier thought to be? Less good (like lesbian families) then come out more positive (sample bias) until epidemiological studies normalised. Future research: identity development in adolescents and young adults who have always known of DI origins. What issues do they have about searching for the donor? Through DI network / their day workshops, there might be a chance to tape a 'focus group' with the teenagers.

11th August 1998

I have been organising the first interview with 'David'. Telephone conversations have been a little awkward, and a strong reluctance to allow two interviews. Agreed to 90 mins and when I arrived he said his wife would be returning 15" before the 4pm deadline. I wondered if he was worried that either he or I would not be able to stop. I am not sure how influenced or complicated the negotiation has been by the fact that we met in 1972/3, when I was a young teenager and he working briefly with my father. I did not remember the meeting.

He was welcoming and hospitable, and did not appear nervous. He did not want to use the vehicle of the story told to another. He quickly launched into his account, which probably

reflected the familiarity he has with telling it. He has been on a television programme about DI, wrote about this part of his life in his autobiography, and mentioned that he had written an article for the Times.

After his account, which was detailed and wide-ranging, he was forthcoming in answer to questions. I felt a little inhibited looking at the schedule. He seemed to say less about his relationship with his mother than with his father, and very little about extended family. He shied away from making any link between his early experiences and decision to be childfree. He was committed to the idea that the secrecy was dangerous, and advocated openness for future offspring of DI. He had thought less about the issues of concealment and trust.

The interview went smoothly, he was fairly unemotional throughout, but used strong words to convey his strength of feeling. The interview finished on time, and we parted amicably. He expressed an interest in the results.

17th August 1998

Another interview - with 'Martine' a few days ago. For me a more relaxed, open, and warm experience. Why? Had she processed it more? something to do with the similarities between us on a quite personal level (decade birthdays, mutual good friend, even doing up our respective gardens!), or being a woman? She was immensely hospitable.

Such a different story, but with common features. Was struck by how much more emotion talked about. Is this a gender difference? women using more emotional language? Aspects of the account e.g. 'sous x' seemed to illustrate her capacity to think about another's' emotions when few thought of hers. An interesting example of how clues planted earlier are not picked up at a conscious level, but of very powerful experiences that brought forth feelings of vulnerability, belonging, threat.

Noticed that we did not get through the whole of the schedule intended for the first meeting, partly because the wide range of issues that emerged - foreign country, law, etc., and yet the detail felt fuller, richer than the previous interview. I wonder if I will think that when I analyse them. It made me think about mothers? and wanting to look really closely at what participants say about them even though it is the father who may be the non-biological. Is there some greater expectation on mothers for honesty/trust?

I feel very privileged to hear these accounts in their entirety, and to have the freedom to ask questions, probe. It is a measure of considerable trust I think. It does feel important to acknowledge that there has been a secret like this in my family, to make the balance more equitable.

Written reply from Participant 1 expressing interest in the findings. And willingness to meet again. A surprise as he had been quite firm about the time he had available being limited. I wonder what that says about how the interview affected him.

I am getting the mail out ready. Probably 200 all together. It might just be possible that this will access 15 participants and mean that national advertising is not essential.

I am really fascinated to start analysing them both, differences and contrasts. The detailed questions of the interview schedule have proved unnecessary so far - each participant has wanted to tell their story in their way, and much of it has been covered. But it has been helpful in organising my thoughts as we go along. It is quite a task to hold the research frame in mind, and not get quite immersed in the account. Certainly the recent one was more intense, I felt very tired in a way that I did not after the first, which seemed more rehearsed, organised, superficial.

22nd August 1998

Yesterday I had my first introduction to the software, and I noticed that it felt quite emotional to be starting the analysing of data. I connected this to my own experience, and was pleased with my decision to tell participants that there had been an experience like this in my family too. I also feel that it is appropriate to offer to share the story in some cases when the research interviews are concluded - not all, as I think this is an issue of privacy (not secrecy) and personal choice.

As I started to go through the text I was struck by the contrast between what people said they felt and how they expressed this to their 'parents'. I might look at this in all participants, perhaps I should ask in interview 2 what stopped them - is it the precariousness of connection that has suddenly been made very explicit, the obvious lack of consideration of the importance of the information from the offspring's point of view. It will be helpful if there are some people who are told in a planned way by their parents to contrast this with. Who gets the anger? the distress? - partners and current relationships - how do they get affected by this?

I have done the bulk of the mail out (150ish) and am hopeful that this will lead to sufficient participants and that an advert won't be necessary. Already two people have said they know someone...so I can be hopeful.

23rd August 1998

Call from 'Jill' about her willingness to participate. Delighted that something is happening. Date planned for October

6th October 1998

Returning from a long trip, I was hopeful of a few responses to the mail out, but was disappointed.

19th October 1998

I have spent hours with the two tapes of the interviews I have done, getting the transcription accurate and reflecting the pauses and hesitations. The contrast is interesting, David is very fluent, except in certain passages, whilst Martine is much more thoughtful. I must think about how much of this may be their own styles and personalities and how much the differential effects and reactions to the experience.

20th October 1998

The Learning Set today was really helpful. It contributed to the process of pulling out themes. Now I am thinking of dividing the text up into areas of enquiry, so that I can compare and contrast participants' experiences in each area - and an analysis of themes. It feels quite daunting but the most important thing is to start.

25th October 1998

I have done more letters including the Donor Support organisation in Australia. Their response was positive and this now means that a number of organisations - NORCAP, the post adoption centre, maybe the Stepfamily Association, and a number of other venues Devon Pastoral Counsellors and the IFT conference will be ways of getting the study known about. I will wait until mid to late November before placing adverts in Time Out etc. just in case the response improves with this greater number of Information Sheets in circulation.

29th October 1998

I have been excited as the themes emerge and some of my ideas appear to fit the things people talk about. The differences between interviews are fascinating and the pulling out of different aspects helps me to hone my thinking. It is a very reflexive process. I had an awful time with the software at the point of trying to get things out of it. I was given a contact at Nottingham University. She was unbelievably helpful and agreed to offer me some direct supportive consultation at a later stage when I have more data to work with. This felt very containing. Finally developed my first summary. I thought a great deal how to pitch it and decided on a direct, personalised and informal approach.

2nd November 1998

My first 'second interview'. The preliminary analysis was considered accurate and the discussion enabled me to focus on some of the curiosities I developed while working on the text. This participant took up my offer to tell the account of the secret in my family. It was a strange experience for me to have her comments. It is the first time I can think that I have recounted the details to someone with a similar experience. I guess because of the nature of this individual she was interested too in the effects the research was having on me - and I have been reflecting on this from time (using JRL). Some interesting reverberations.

I also did the first workshop with The Devon Pastoral Counsellors on therapeutic work with secrets and had some helpful feedback. This included participants' needs to see their own experience as holders and subjects more fully. I'll use that for the workshop I'm doing at the Institute of Family Therapy Conference later in the month.

Some ideas also came out of discussions, which I need to think more about in terms of the research and analysis. People wondered if finding a mother would be more important than finding a father – need to think about why this might be so - who actually gave birth? Would this be the same if donor egg & sperm. Do DI fathers feel rivalry with the imagined qualities of the donor apart from potency? Revelations being at a crisis point in family life. Tendency to idealise – discomfort with the social parent, absence of donor father. Importance of knowing biological inheritance. Very prominent in the workshop were the strength of some individuals' feelings about fertility, and prejudices against various reproductive techniques.

11th November 1998

I have been delighted to get some responses from people willing to participate. Unfortunately, one participant told me ten minutes in to it, that he had always known of his adoption but had no information whatsoever about the details of his biological parents. I felt I should continue with the interview, but am not sure if I can include it. However it was fascinating to think of the differences in response when the fact of different parentage was known at an early age. His responses to searching and the finding of information were very different.

I have also had contact from people who have discovered new information about siblings...either full or half siblings they did not know they had, or finding that someone with whom they thought they shared both parents in fact only had one in common with them. I feel that these may be useful to interview for the book (If I ever get to that stage!) - thus taking a slightly broader view of secrets about biological relations than my doctorate study.

Some contacts have come from a long distance (USA and Australia) and I have had to grapple with how I might tackle this, e.g. getting them to tape their responses to questions based on the interview schedule. I have submitted adapted consent forms to the Ethics panel in case this happens.

Another workshop presentation as part of the 'Child's Perspective' conference. I focused this on DI circumstances as these are so clearly legislated about. One of the people who attended was a member of the HFEA, who was very interested, suggested I write for Reproductive Medicine, and asked if I would do the workshop for the HFEA at some point.

I have two more first interviews in the next two weeks, others are being transcribed (a basic version for me to hone), so there is much work ahead. But it is energising and I feel quite passionate about it.

18th November 1998

NCH meeting, lots of strong feelings, and I marvelled at how some of the medical profession can so blatantly ignore other views citing the need for research evidence- and then create a context in which research is very difficult. About the legal perspective, finally found Richard White (solicitor) to be interested in this area, he's been involved in Parental Orders in some surrogacy cases. Asked about birth certificates and legal aspects: he said he'd do some research. Obvious clash between medical view and that of therapist/counsellor, and in discussion groups much heated debate with people using different statistics.

20th November 1998

Another interview – the most like my own family story yet. An open easy interview, but I was aware that the initial reactions and longer-term consequences were very different from previous interviews. She seemed to realise in the process about the many aspects she had not thought about before.

24th November 1998

First go at my second summary for 'David'. Struck by how very different it is from 'Martine'. Contrasts around initial reactions, the consequences in the family, his openness with the world and enormous relief at NOT belonging. I'm struck by how loyalty and sensitivity to the parental position continues despite the assault on self, or enormous rejection of attachment.

Suddenly feeling anxious about the analysis and pleased I have a tutorial this afternoon. I have three interviews next week and two tapes awaiting transcription. The sense of urgency grows.

28th November 1998

There has been a lot richness in the last week. Some of the themes that have emerged so far have started me linking to psychological concepts, for example - the distant difficult r/ps could be viewed in terms of entitlement (see adoption literature) and/or attachment.

Rewriting one's story is clearly in the realm of social constructionism and differences emerging between people who discovered in adolescence may be related to Erickson's theory of Identity and the developmental stages. So...interesting.

The recent tutorial was also very useful. The slight changes required by overseas participants fall within the ethical umbrella and thus are unlikely to prove a problem. Although email data will be different, qualitatively, from taped data – thus I probably should encourage people to record their responses to the questions. Research diary meets the expectations. Whew!

I am having other thoughts: the offspring's attempt to understand the social context and family relationships that made the keeping of such a secret (which is against the covert assumption of trust about this connection) might be seen as a way of reducing the anger people feel, makes it more manageable and allows the offspring not to see the adult as bad – but as a 'victim' of circumstances even though they may fundamentally disagree with the decision to

keep the secret. This sensitivity to the parents is exemplified in most cases by lack of confrontation, and the joining in the secret by not spreading it. Such sensitivity to another's perspective is not accorded the unaware very often by anyone who knew in the system. Is this a feature of secret holders....or could it be worked through therapeutically?

I noticed the title of a paper on 'forgiveness' in JFT. I should read it – it might be helpful.

RE: themes: some bi- or multi polar eg belonging. Some in different domains: CCM (Cronen & Pearce) e.g. of behaviours and explanation/understanding e.g. distance with father as function of unresolved conflict? Hierarchical organisation - i.e. some meta to others.

Complicated by my having designated some areas for investigation: initial reaction, within which I am interested in difference and pattern. Need to discuss this in the Analysis section: would not expect tidy, non-contradictory classification, human experience of a profoundly unsettling, complex nature. Need to look for interconnections, links and ambivalence between themes. Patterns over the entire sample, relating to circumstances. Worth thinking of Kelly, are constructs one word codes for more complex narratives – reductionism. Narrative allows for richness of dialogue.

Reading the Snowden book, the first book I have read which tries to think out the implications of reproductive technologies. Fascinating.

Jonathan Smith – a clear, organised and deeply connected presentation. Fed totally into my current dilemmas, what to focus on, what to leave aside as un- or less important, what constitutes a theme? Am interested in using the IPA as a way of annotating the next transcript, more logical and containing, then using NUD.IST to perform the 'cut and paste' function. I can then go back to the others if need be, although I think many of the themes are rising out of the data, but I think the process and the consultation will help in the task of what to allow to drift away.

I also felt the need to reorganise my papers, which have been in a very clear system for me alone, but would be awkward to place before another for the purposes of an Independent Audit. This seemed to be a really important way of checking the validity of the work. Some sort of inter-rater reliability can also be done.... I need to think of this more.

6th December 1998

Some more interviews. 'Henry' very calm, relaxed and talkative, a great deal of detail about family context and the socio-political climate of S Africa. He reminded me of 'David' in his equanimity on hearing the truth about his parentage. Is this a gender issue? I was distraught to find that despite checking – the tape was only a loud hiss. I have emailed him - and await a response. An equipment malfunction has been one of my worst nightmares. It made me obsessively careful; and very anxious when I was doing another two days later. The equipment worked at home – but I was shaky about trusting it.

The next interview with 'Edith' was very different. She was much more fragile. She had prepared sandwiches and cakes and seemed to be struggling to show a calm exterior. She frequently became tearful as we talked, and of all the people I have interviewed so far, the damage to her selfhood, sense of ugliness, shame and responsibility for many sad and tragic events was very powerful. The enormity of her immediate reaction was most similar to 'Martine', another adoption story. It has raised the likelihood that adoption – i.e. lack of biological connection to BOTH 'parents' is significantly different from a secret about only one. Although I have an idea that the way this then plays out in relationships is different –perhaps the biological parent (usually the mother) becomes the focus of greater expectations.

My original organisation of notes seemed inadequate after the seminar by Jonathan Smith. Today I reorganised them into a file, with sections for tracking and forms, transcripts and notes. NUD.IST print outs that I have so far.

23rd December 1998

The last few weeks have been really hard work, a great deal to do with the problems of getting tapes transcribed. I have been feeling anxious and panicky that until they are done the really demanding part of the work cannot even begin.

I have been trying to use IPA with the most recent transcript, sending a copy of my annotations to Jonathan Smith for comment. We had an hour-long conversation, which was extremely valuable. He was complimentary about my interview style, which he felt was very facilitative and not heavy handed. He was struck by the richness of the data and how much was embedded within it. So I felt he could understand my sense of being overwhelmed. On reflection I think it is this feeling that led me to developing the frequency count approach as a preliminary analysis of the first two. While I think the themes emerging from this way of approaching the data are valid, the analysis remains at a rather superficial level.

He felt that my annotations and comments made sense to him on reading the transcript but that I was stuck at the level of developing clusters of themes and the discussion helped me to feel that I could have the confidence to take this step. He shared some of his ideas with me, and although I did not entirely agree with him, it gave me a very helpful sense of how I might do this. I liked his idea of seeking labels for themes which might reflect the participants own words e.g. web of intrigue. So – to ground the analysis firmly in the data - stick to the individuals own experience, vocabulary relevant to that person at that time. This may produce different terms but it may lead to a higher order category at a later point to cover both.

He had some other useful suggestions: staying with each one until the analysis is complete, and only looking at comparisons/ differences and similarities when they are all done, so that each analysis is grounded in the text and not too influenced by others. He also suggested that an in depth discussion of the analysis would lead to another level (and great quantities more pages) of analysis, best perhaps done with one or two participants as a separate paper when the dissertation is finished. He advocated returning for respondent validation, checking if anything was missing and an opportunity for reflection on the process. This makes sense given the copious amount to be considered and the numbers – at least 10.

Alongside all this as I read, listen to so many I am aware of convergences-
Search for belonging
Looking for clues about self in father
Question of believing and of not being believed

Other ideas?
Punishment/ostracism of the one who breaks the rule (finds out, wants to talk)
Individuals' marginalisation is disguised, emerges with full force once known.
Shattering of the world – the same but entirely different
Kaleidoscope – having to re-arrange all the pieces re-ordering,
Wall of silence

I have pretty much decided not to use NUD.IST – it does not add much to the process for me now that I am feeling that IPA offers a clear framework. So I will re-analyse the first two transcripts using this framework.

20th January 1999

I met with Rudi yesterday and was again aware of my sense of being overwhelmed by the quantity of data to analyse, and that I have not started the Introduction and Literature Review. Feeling worried that I don't have enough time to realistically complete in April. Add to that feeling scared about a viva.

And yet, I am also feeling pleased with the interviews and that I have completed 11, with all but four transcribed and ready for analysis. I think the advice of 'just get on with it' will be good to follow – and to try and leave the anxiety about April or September submission to sort

itself out. It doesn't help that there are major issues at work and some important personal decisions to be considered in the next few weeks.

The last four interviews – carried out in the last two weeks have also been fascinating. Although I appreciate that each story is unique, I am also aware of commonalities emerging. And yet - I am struck by how differently people respond to such information, some seemingly to take it in their stride and incorporate it, and sometimes a number of people into their worlds, while others struggle with the pain of it, and what it says about relationships.

I sent Jonathan my efforts on the transcript yesterday, but today I am already feeling that they could be more honed. I am concerned not to be too much of a demand on him. Somehow I am feeling if I can get reassurance as to how am approaching one transcript – they are so long, I fear missing out something vital – I will be able to proceed with more confidence. This element of the 'interpretative' aspect of qualitative work is underestimated – and it is really helpful to hold onto the fact that one is not making interpretations without data to back it up.... Remembering that my themes are 'grounded' in the text is essential.

22nd January 1999

Another qualitative shift in my experience. I completed the analysis on 'Edith' and it was very different to 'Juliette'. This helped me to have confidence in my having grounded them, and that they really reflected the individual and not what I wanted to see. I also devised a way of doing the line referencing that facilitated the process – using two computers. So, I moved to feeling more confident, and less fearful about what gets left out.

Jonathan phoned, having received my anxious emails. Quickly noticed that I was sounding stronger. A helpful conversation reminding me that the process of trying to say something about a group will inherently mean that a degree of detail about each individual gets left out. We began to think about writing up – though I think this is a step too far ahead for me at the moment – but he said that it is possible to look at individual and group themes in the presentation. I realise that as a therapist, there are small aspects of these stories that would warrant exploration, and find it helpful to remind myself (repeatedly) that this is research – not therapy – and that the richness of what I have is much more than quantitative methodology would convey.

So, a brighter day. 'Just get on with it' is a good motto'

12th February 1999

I have had two of the analyses subjected to an independent audit – very interesting, and a relief that both people (one of whom really worked **very, very** thoroughly on the task) reported that they could see how the analysis was grounded in the text. And a bonus – we had an interesting discussion about self –in-relation and other aspects of self. I still want a third to be looked at in the same way and she has agreed to do it.

Two of the final participants I had hoped to include have proved unavailable in what I think is a workable timescale. I hope that the ten or is it twelve I am left with will be sufficient to be acceptable.

15th February 1999

I have taken five analyses back to participants in the last ten days, with generally positive responses. As I do this I am very aware of how the clusters form very individually for each of them to be coherent. And yet, some of the sub-themes – like self blame/criticism might be common to many, there are yet others where this is in the text at a lower level.

Some of the theories/ideas that have been going through my mind are attachment theory that may link to the degree of connectedness or lack of it that some people describe with their parents. The 'meaning of the child' could be seen to influence parent-child relationships too. Around identity I want to re-read some of the social constructionist ideas, and also think more about the age issue, and how Erickson stages might be important. Also resilience and protective factors – other parental figures ('Juliette' talks of grandparents, 'Ella' of the quality of relationship with her father, 'Rosa' – of the strong connection with her MGM, 'Jill' of her mother)

26th February 1999

I have lost my momentum and got a bit behind my planned schedule – there have been two deaths in my close circle in the last few weeks... and the deadline is looming, with much to do.

Yesterday's tutorial with Rudi and workshop with Jonathan Smith, have helped me think about the next stage: moving to the group from the individual. Putting my thoughts into spoken language really helps, and I think the idea of dictating sections about the findings which I can then work on will be a helpful device. Some of the ideas around are that although the power of different themes vary for individuals, they each tell a narrative about how they attempt to integrate this new fundamental information into their construction of the world, and there attempts to make sense of it. Both Rita and I shared our feeling that we were finding the 'obvious' – or so it seemed once we have been immersed in the data. Rudi's wonder at the richness of it all was very reassuring. I have also been struggling with a sense of family beliefs/rules which are embedded in the account but not necessarily clearly articulated.

We had a useful discussion about the group/individual balance in the write-up. I am wondering whether comparisons where there are differences in age at discovery, length of time since, type of secret, and those with/without a responsive secret keeper will be worthwhile.

In looking within and among the themes for individuals several supra-ordinate themes appear to be emerging:

- Impact of revelation – immediate and the shifts over time
- Effects on relationships - within the apparent family, in the biological parent(s) sought and other relations, and passed on to the next generation. (see the Rustin 1999 paper)
- Secret organised systems (maybe this might link with Karpel) – communication within the family e.g. wall of silence, web of intrigue,
- Identity and sense of self.
- Creating meanings and explanations
- Childhood and pre-revelation relationships (experiencing difference)

I keep reminding myself that my interpretative stance will be affected by my position as woman, a clinical psychologist and systemically trained therapist and as someone with a personal experience of secrets. And I have a real interest in differences between peoples' experiences.

Today I have finished the checking of the final transcript, hurray! And am trying to set up a new schedule to work to over the next couple of weeks.

8th March 1999

I have completed all the individual analyses. I have written sending preliminary analyses where my return for a follow up discussion is not possible. 'David' wrote back very quickly and positively.

I am aware of a different quality of anxiety which hangs around (as well as that to do with time pressure) – it is a lot to do with whether other people will feel that what I produce is

meaningful. I am so conscious that the narratives shared with me are people's intimate and often painful experience that I am concerned to do justice to them. I have planned a strategy using an entire wall to start thinking about the group themes, using a mind map. I want to wait until the weekend to work solidly on it for a couple of days. So in the interim, I have been taking another look at the dissertation guidelines, a very practical and very necessary step. I am also reflecting on the Extended Essay and Small Scale Research Project and my writings related to each of them, as they have been such an intrinsic part of how the dissertation developed.

17th March 1999

My wall sized mind map has helped me to think out some of the structure for writing about the results, though I have felt rather paralysed about putting finger to keyboard. Forcing myself to a meta-level in relation to the data leads to some interesting observations about the data and the process.

I completed my last follow up interview yesterday, and saw Rudi – so felt that I was on the precipice of writing. At each stage in this process I have felt the weight of responsibility of presenting participants accurately, and this is now combined with the need to create something that is readable and extends people's thinking – well, that's the hope. Also have looming anxiety about being assessed, particularly in the quantitative/qualitative debate – but I can't imagine how this topic could be approached any other way.

I started writing today, and found myself constantly referring to the context and relationships in which people's experience is embedded. This makes it hard to write concisely. I am sure it makes sense to 'just keep going', and then get some feedback on it. I am also beginning to draw various diagrams which reflect some of my thinking – a simple set of concentric circles that emphasises the need to think of issues at individual, family (or families) level and an acknowledgement of the influence of society. The other much scrappier, which tries to map the elements that may influence individual experience. Maybe these are steps towards a tentative model?

26th March 1999

Writing up the results is proving a challenge – the sheer amount of data, the topic which leads me to feel the need to put in contextual information much of the time, and the importance of longish quotes to convey participants experience. Turning it into something coherent that people can read fluently, and from which people might learn something new continues to feel like a monumental task.

At the same time, aspects become clearer. Although the interviews focussed on one person's experience there are indications about parents. For example, 'meaning of the child' issues, which along with other factors may determine how parents do the parenting of particular children. I am constantly shifting between levels, societal – which contribute to the meaning of the child anyway, and the marital relationship and belief system. I found an interesting paper on Favouritism in JFT which links with the awareness of difference theme.

12th April 1999

I took some time out over Easter hoping that coming back to writing a little fresh would help. It did, but then I got really stuck trying to write a first draft of the discussion. I realised it was the tension of wanting to ground everything I said in the data while also elucidating my ideas about a tentative model – which of course would need to be explored further.

Another supervision session was helpful in grounding me, and sharpening some of my thinking. I felt more able to commit myself to having ideas about what processes people go through based on my research findings.

16th April 1999

Curiously there have been two calls in the last 36 hours from other professionals I have met through the research, wanting to give my number out in relation to some TV programmes. The BBC is planning two programmes, one in the areas of secrets generally and the other about reproductive technology in particular. As I spoke to each of the people I felt that my understanding of the area had grown enormously and that I did have interesting and important points to make. So that has fed back into the process of writing the penultimate draft.

19th April 1999

Well the penultimate draft is almost ready to go to Rudi. I have been painstakingly getting the Appendices together and sorting out the Contents page. Another problem has appeared – I wanted to add in extracts from the original annotated transcripts with all my notes in the margins. I did not think when I first did them about the problem a) photocopying, which does not reach right to the edges and b) binding which will cut in to them. I wonder whether Rudi will have any ideas.

24th April 1999

Problem solved! Reducing the size on the copier results in exactly what I needed. One of those useful practical bits of knowledge that I could have done with earlier. A bit more work to do following what was probably the last supervision session. Some final efforts to make the whole piece of work a little crisper and the discussion better organised. I really am near the end of writing now, spending time on presentation, and checking references and page numbers. I am hopeful of meeting the original deadline even though I have the short extension.

It feels poignant to reach this stage, and reflect on the experience as a whole. What an intense experience of learning and discovery. It feels really worthwhile, particularly the sense of new directions for more research, the potential for developing some clinical service in this area (there's a challenge for me) and the possibility of sharing my knowledge and ideas about these issues more widely. So an ending and a beginning....